

# MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



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## THE CLUE OF THE PEKING MAN

The new Mike Shayne short novel

by

BRETT HALLIDAY

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## THE DEAD SURVIVE

A "Different" story

by

CHARLES W. RUNYON

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# MIKE SHAYNE



## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SEPT. 1974  
VOL. 35, NO. 4

TWO COMPLETE SHORT NOVELS

### NEW MIKE SHAYNE ADVENTURE

## THE CLUE OF THE PEKING MAN

by BRETT HALLIDAY

*Murder was the case and death the reward when the simple ad appeared in the Daily News. The strange collection of ancient bones from China brought the grave and vengeance to those who sought them.*

2 to 49

### A "DIFFERENT" STORY

## THE DEAD SURVIVE

by CHARLES W. RUNYON

*He saw his friend emerge unscathed from a fire, but it was only the beginning of a series of unholy events which led from the quiet forest to a dark cave, where the friend became the hunter...*

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*Complete*

# THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



# The Clue of The Peking Man

by BRETT HALLIDAY

*From archaeological treasure, to war booty, to a mystery that puzzled scientists and collectors the world over, the bones had seemingly returned to taunt a tired woman and threaten Mike Shayne!*



PERSPIRATION dribbled into Mike Shayne's eye. Swiftly, he wiped away the film with the back of a huge hand and regripped the steering wheel, fingers working reflexively as he concentrated on the two fast moving station wagons ahead.

They flashed across intersec-

tions and shot along the streets of the quiet Miami residential neighborhood as if they were racing on an open highway.

Shayne—keeping a sharp eye for moving traffic coming from the sidestreets—piloted his powerful convertible expertly. Applying more pressure to the

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accelerator, he gained another foot on the station wagons.

Behind him, the large blue sedan continued to tailgate.

The private detective's scowl deepened and he again wiped away sweat as he flashed another glance into his rear view mirror. The reflected blue sedan was occupied by four men who sat like statues.

Were the men killers?

"Foster," Shayne grveled, raising his voice against the sound of the wind, "take a look behind us. Do you know them?"

Shayne's passenger twisted on the seat, and out of the corner of his eye the detective saw Foster jerk. But Foster remained silent. Shayne grunted, returned his concentration to the station wagons.

Then the blue sedan made its move. It swung into the left lane and moved up beside the convertible with a fresh surge of power. Shayne flicked it a glance. The four occupants of the sedan continued to sit like statues, two in front, two in back. They were Orientals.

Shayne jerked his foot from the accelerator and the convertible slowed immediately.

The move triggered Foster. "No!" he shouted, reaching out and clamping fingers on the detective's arm. "Stay with them! We can't lose them!"

Shayne shook off the fingers.

He had survival in mind now, nothing else. He had spotted what looked like the snouts of submachine guns sticking up like grave markers in the back seat of the sedan. One blast from either snout and Shayne figured he no longer would know the heaven of lush Miami. The other heaven might be lush, too, but he wasn't ready to be an explorer.

"Shayne!" shouted Foster. "Catch them!"

The two station wagons and the blue sedan moved out, quickly widening the distance from the convertible. Shayne's scowl darkened. The wagons and sedan would not lose him. But he puzzled now. The four Orientals had ignored him. The sedan had surged on to move up beside the wagons, then slowly inched out front, continuing to speed down the left lane of the street.

Shayne waited for a blast from the machine gun. It had to come.

But the blue sedan was ahead of the wagons now, still rolling in the left lane. Shayne continued to drop back. He had no intention of piling his car into the rear of a shot-up station wagon.

And then the wall of fire bounced off the street. It disappeared. Another wall appeared.

Shayne yelled and jammed

the brake pedal. The convertible went into a skid, the rear coming around to the right. Foster shouted a startled oath as the detective concentrated on riding the skid. He worked the steering wheel expertly, turning into the skid. The convertible stopped bouncing, righted. Shayne kept his eyes on the station wagons. Both were weaving crazily as if being tested on a tire track. Then they swayed into the curbing and stopped simultaneously.

Shayne braked the convertible, and then snaked the .45 from his shoulder rig. He peeled out of the car and used the open door as a shield. Crouching behind it, he leveled the .45, its muzzle braced against the door edge.

A new wall of fire appeared up ahead. It formed a barrier that blocked the street.

Shayne flinched, shook his head. Perhaps the wall was appropriate. There had been another fire at the beginning of this crazy business.

## II

THE JETLINER was settling softly into International Airport at Miami that Tuesday afternoon and Mike Shayne sat relaxed in the erect seat, seat belt fastened as instructed by

the lithe, dark-haired stewardess.

Successfully completed was a case that had taken him to Minneapolis. He had liked Minneapolis as a city, but he preferred Miami, and he grinned as he looked out of the small window. The sun had spread another golden film on the area. And Lucy Hamilton, his secretary, would be waiting for him inside the terminal. Shayne's grin widened as her image flashed across his mind.

Then he saw the crashed plane and the fire and smoke. He frowned and strained against the window but the crash scene was gone instantly as the jetliner touched down and rolled smoothly along the runway, the pressure of braking forcing him forward slightly.

Shayne knew the crash was probably only seconds old, otherwise this area of International would have been sealed off. The stewardesses kept plastered smiles and the plane captain intoned only a routine welcome to Miami as the Jet hooked up for debarking.

Inside the terminal, Shayne found Tim Rourke, the veteran Miami newspaperman and a friend of long standing, waiting for him. Shayne was curious.

"Hey, Tim," the redhead said as they shook hands, "missing



a scoop? Or didn't you see that little accident out there."

The thin man's usually sombre countenance lightened. "I phoned in the lead," he said, "but the paper's sending out a man for the details—I'm on another assignment—and I want your help."

"That's why Lucy's not here."

"Right," Rourke said.

"What's up?" the detective asked as the two walked toward the baggage check-out counter.

"A bomb threat at the paper—and a helluva interesting yarn if it holds up. Come on, I'm driving a company car. Easier for them to get gas than a mere citizen, these days. I'll fill you in."

After they had collected Shayne's single suitcase and had settled in the *Daily News* car, Rourke passed the redhead a folded newspaper. An ad in the Personals column of the Classified section was encircled in red. It said: "\$5,000 for information leading to the Peking Man. Box 100. *Daily News*."

Rourke moved the sedan into the line of traffic leaving the parking lot and said, "A man named Randolph Foster from Los Angeles placed the ad and sent money for a week's run. That was three days ago. Yesterday, we got a phoned, anonymous bomb threat de-

manding that the ad not appear again. The threat was ignored. We get a lot of them these days. Then this morning there was an answer to the ad. A woman came in, told the Classified people she had information about the Peking Man, left a phone number.

"Classified didn't get too excited with the placing of the ad. We get all kinds of screwball things to run. But with the bomb threat and the woman this morning, people started stirring stumps. Looked like it might be news. Dirksen sicced my buddy Joe Roberts—who volunteered he had a vague recollection of something legitimate called the Peking Man—on to research and me into checking out Foster in Los Angeles. The papers out there have morgue files a foot thick each on the guy.

"He's one of these whiz kids who came out of nowhere after World War II and made it big. He got a leg up as computers came into being and his outfit continues to produce some of the world's best. Randolph Foster is legit, wealthy, and will sip a warm glass of beer with a factory worker or some exotic ulcer-breeder with a shah. He's painted as a guy who is at home in either company, a rare character.

"Joe, meanwhile, tagged the



Peking Man. The way I get it, it's a general term for a collection of human bones, about forty skulls, one hundred fifty teeth and numerous other bones that date man back something like two million years. Chinese in origin, the collection—considered priceless, incidentally—supposedly disappeared around the beginning of World War II. Stories about the Peking Man circulate among collectors, but all are vague.

"Foster apparently has some reason to think this treasure might be here in Miami. Incidentally, he's flying in here tonight. I wanted to talk to him, but there's a line, I discover, between protecting the anonymity of one who places a blind ad and a news story. Classified is screaming that Foster has paid for anonymity and is entitled.

"Dirksen, of course, is screaming that Foster and his Peking Man and the bomb threat is a hot news story. The hierarchy debates. Meanwhile, I've got a hunch that bomb threat may tie in—and since you're such a pal of mine, I thought you might be interested in helping me track it down.

"I might add, Mike," the reporter said grimly, "that if Foster really is hunting the Peking Man, and if he's digging up in-



formation, he could also be digging up trouble."

"So you take this bomb threat seriously?" Shayne said.

"Yes and no. I think a few guns might be in order. Men have died because of these bones already, I understand from Roberts."

"So we keep a sharp eye out. We take the caller seriously, for now, anyway. This all sounds like just my kind of case, Tim."

"That's what I thought," Rourke grinned. "Do you want to ride along with me? See what we dig up?"

"You know it," the redhead

smiled back. "I don't like threats any more than you do. And it sounds like you have a hell of a story building here. I'd like to watch it develop. Now—tell me how the threat came in, who handled it, the details."

"One of the switchboard girls caught the call. Local call, male voice. According to the girl, the guy says 'One more ad about the Peking Man and you get a bomb in the front door.' The guy hangs up."

"You talked to the girl?"

"Yeah, I spent almost an hour with her," Rourke said. "She's the level-headed type, Mike. The caller had a bass voice, she said, words distinct. On the other hand, she thinks the caller was a young person, say mid-to-late twenties."

"Why does she think that?"

Rourke shrugged. "She listens to voices on a phone five days a week. She subconsciously categorizes voices, fits them to people."

Shayne used the thumb and forefinger of his right hand to tug the lobe of his left ear. "Your bosses think the caller might have been a nut?"

"The possibility was discussed, voted down."

"And Will Gentry?"

Rourke took time to pass a sedan before he replied, "Will hasn't been informed so far. No

need to yet—and Dirksen's still thinking story, naturally, and he figures that if Will and his cops are called, the door is opened to the TV boys. Dirksen thinks a private look-see is the only way to go—for the moment. And I agree. So I came to you, like I said."

The detective said, "Dirksen understands, I assume, that if I turn up something big, Will gets it."

Rourke nodded.

"Okay. You said Foster is flying in tonight?"

"When the Classified people called him this morning about the woman who answered the ad, he asked about hotels. I checked around this afternoon, found he'd made a reservation at the Dolphin, but that he's not expected until after midnight. While waiting for you at the airport, I also checked incoming flights. There's one in from Los Angeles at eleven-forty tonight. That should be Foster's."

Shayne grunted satisfaction. Rourke was not a man to allow moss to grow under his feet. "And I suppose you've got the woman staked out too?"

"Not staked out," Rourke admitted. "But I checked the phone number she left for Foster in the Polk directory, and found it's at a bar named the Red Fish. No one at the news-

paper ever heard of it, so it must be a hole in the wall."

"The Red Fish," Shayne grunted. "Let's hope our bomber and our lady aren't just a couple of red herrings."

### III

THE RED FISH had a narrow front, a sunken doorway and a broken neon sign. It was squashed among other low, squeezed business ventures that looked as if they should have gone the way of brick streets. Lethargic sidewalk loiterers were young Latins, and it was as if they were seeing moonmen. It was that kind of neighborhood.

As the detective and the newspaperman crossed the sidewalk, Rourke remarked, "I've got a suspicion, pal, we'd be more welcome if it was the first of the month and we were postmen bearing welfare checks."

Inside, the Red Fish was a dingy, shallow watering hole oozing stale odors. A Latin man who hadn't been to a barber in a year sat alone at the bar. He wore a sweat shirt, wrinkled pants and shower togs, and he didn't bother to look up from his beer mug as Shayne and Rourke moved into the bar.

Shayne glanced around. From his vantage, he could see

three sharpies huddled in a booth in a corner and a woman sitting alone at a table. The woman looked to be in her late sixties and weathered; her attire had survived since the 1950s. She cupped a small glass in her hand and did not seem to be interested in new arrivals.

Shayne shot another glance at the sharpies. They were interested. They continued to huddle, but each had a head cocked so that with no more than a side glance he could take in the strangers. They were silent now, returning Shayne's inventory. One had a hooked nose, another a narrow jaw and slit eyes. The third one was little more than a kid. He still had smooth skin, but he was nervous. He couldn't seem to sit still.

Shayne turned to the bartender, a wizened little man with a black mole high on one cheek, yellow teeth and schooled eyes that were wary. The eyes danced between Shayne and Rourke, went outside to the parked car. "Name's Bart," the bartender finally grunted. "You guys from the newspaper?"

Shayne heard stirrings in the booth and the slight scrape of a chair behind him. Down the bar, the Latin emptied his beer glass, turned from the stool and clomped out of the Red Fish.

without looking to the right or left.

"We're from the *Daily News*, right," Rourke told the bartender. "Your wife here? I think she left a message at the newspaper earlier today."

"Ain't married," grunted Bart.

"Well, now... I see," said Rourke. He leaned elbows on the bar, pondered as if in deep thought. Then he said, "Tell you what I'm going to do, Bart. I'm going to confide in you. I really shouldn't. It's kind of newspaper business, none of yours, but you look like a guy who can keep his yap shut and—"

"I got button lips if'n I'm of a mind, that's for sure, fella," Bart interrupted.

"Well, then, I'll tell you," Rourke nodded. "We're looking for a woman who might be a regular customer here, who might live around here, who might give your telephone number as a..."

Shayne tuned out Rourke's words and went to the woman who sat alone at the table. She looked up at him from bright eyes without stirring.

"May I?" he said politely, pulling out the chair opposite her.

"I ain't sure," said the woman.

"You were at the newspaper office this morning. You left a

telephone number," Shayne said conversationally as he sat opposite her. From his angle he could see the three sharpies in the booth. There were far enough away to be out of earshot of ordinary voices, but they were cocked.

"So how come you didn't call?" said the woman.

Shayne smiled, attempted to be casual. He lit a cigarette, offered the woman the crumpled pack. She dug out a bent cigarette, straightened it with a practiced swipe of fingers, bent to take the match flame. She had deep creases in her skin, large blue veins, and there was a musty odor of age and too much drink about her.

Rourke joined them. The woman flicked him a glance, exhaled smoke, said nothing. Beyond the woman, Shayne saw the three sharpies shift in the booth. It was as if they suddenly had found themselves sitting on ant hills.

Shayne asked the woman, "Do you have a name?"

"Certainly," she said, clipping the word. "Abigail Galloway."

Shayne nodded, sat back and smoked. He motioned to the empty glass in her hand. "And you are drinking?"

"Get to the point, mister," Abigail Galloway said. "How come you didn't call?"

"You like getting telephone calls, Abbie?"

"I wanted to set up a meet."

"Oh." Shayne nodded. "Well, can we consider this a meet?"

"I ain't sure," repeated Abigail Galloway.

"I guess the information you have to pass along is important, huh?"

"I'm the only one in all of Miami that's got it," the woman said firmly. She smoked. "And that's for sure, mister."

Shayne took out his wallet, opened it, exposed a one hundred dollar bill, then tapped the bill back into the wallet and returned the leather to his inside coat pocket. "I consider this a meet," he said.

Abigail Galloway's eyes had brightened. She smoked jerkily. In the corner booth, the three sharpies shifted around on new ant hills.

Shayne hunched forward again. "Time to quit playing games, Abbie. What do you know about the Peking Man?"

Abigail smoked. "You the guy who put the ad in the paper?"

Shayne said nothing, stared at her hard, waited.

She butted the cigarette in a chipped ashtray on the table. "Look, mister, in your ad, you said \$5,000..."

She cut off the words. Shayne

continued to remain silent. Then Abigail Galloway suddenly went soft. She sat back, relaxed, smiled crookedly. "I've had quite a life, you know," she said. Her eyes abruptly mirrored memories and her tone was edged in reminiscence.

"I once was a trapeze artist with the circus, traveled the world, Europe, Asia. Then I met Alexander Holstrom, the explorer. Well, we married and traveled Africa. But poor Alexander was killed in a rhinoceros charge one day, and..."

She waved a hand. "But never mind. Later, I married Phillip Alexander—two Alexanders, you see—and everything was beautiful until Phillip fell from the Dover Cliffs in England. It was a short time later that I became a friend of Marcia Spellman, the authoress, and it was Marcia who brought the Peking Man out of China at the start of World War II and sold it to Archibald Jaynes. That was Archibald Senior, of course, who lived right here in Miami and had this fabulous estate.

"Archibald and I never married, understand, but we were fabulous friends and I was a guest in his mansion on many occasions, and—well, Archibald died one day. Heart attack or something. I never did under-

stand. But now there's only Junior, that's Archibald Junior, and I don't like him, and—well, them bones are in the mansion, mister. Now, can I have my five thousand dollars?"

Shayne flicked a glance at Rourke. The newspaperman was silent, jaw tight, eyes narrowed slightly. Shayne knew Rourke was digesting, thinking. Finally Rourke said, "There is an Archibald Jaynes, Jr., Mike. We do a story on him and his crowd every so often. He's supposed to be a swinger, the jet set type."

Shayne reconsidered Abigail Galloway. "The bones are at the mansion? You've seen them?"

She nodded emphatically. "In the footlockers. There is this line of footlockers in Archibald's—that's Archibald Senior's—vault. Well, it really isn't a vault. I mean, there's this thick red carpeting on the floor, very red carpeting, so I guess you can't say it's a vault, but it's a big room and the footlockers filled with bones are there."

"And are there deep shadows in this room?"

"Shadows?" She cocked her head, considered Shayne. "Oh my, yes, very deep shadows!"

"And candles?"

"Yes, candles, too!"

"Flickering."

"Yes! Lots of them! Lots..."

"Abbie, your munchausen complex is showing."

"Huh?"

Shayne shifted in the chair, butted the cigarette. "Now tell us the truth. How do you know about the bones?"

Her face fell. She stirred in the chair, reflexively reached for the dead cigarette butt in the ashtray. Shayne passed her his crumpled pack again and she looked everywhere but at the detective as she dug out a fresh cigarette. Rourke flicked a lighter flame for her. She exhaled with a hiss and suddenly looked Shayne straight in the eye.

She'd had a son named Howard who, long ago, had been a construction engineer in China. But at the beginning of World War II Howard had been captured by the Japanese and placed in a camp where he had become a friend of an aged missionary. The missionary had had the bones, seven footlockers of bones. The missionary had told Howard the bones were something called the Peking Man and were very valuable.

One day a Japanese officer had come to the camp in a truck. He had ordered Howard to load the footlockers into the truck, then Howard and the missionary were told to ride

with the bones. But a few miles away from the camp, the truck had been stopped and the Japanese officer had come around to the rear and shot Howard and the missionary.

They were dumped on the road. The Japanese officer left them for dead. The missionary had been killed, but Howard had survived. And after many months of living only on his wits had managed to make his way to friendly territory. Eventually, he had been returned to the United States.

Then about a year ago a funny thing had happened: Howard had discovered the same footlockers filled with the same bones right here in Miami. They were in the collection of Archibald Jaynes, Jr.

"Abbie," Shayne said carefully, "you speak of your son as if he is dead."

Her cheek muscles quivered. "He is," she said. "He was killed 'bout a year ago. Hit-and-run driver."

Shayne slid a glance at Rourke. The newspaperman sat without moving or changing expression.

Shayne pressed the woman, "But Howard told you about the footlockers and the bones before he died, right?"

"Me'n Howard never had any secrets," she replied almost defiantly.



"And just how did Howard learn that the bones were in the Jaynes' mansion?"

Abigail Galloway suddenly went distant. "That part ain't important. I want my money. You gonna pay?"

"I'm not the right man, Abbie," Shayne said. "The man who placed the ad is from Los Angeles. He is flying in here tonight. We will bring him to you tomorrow."

She stood suddenly. "Finks!" she snarled.

She turned and marched out of the bar. Shayne and Rourke went after her. "Abbie!" Shayne said sharply.

She whirled on the sidewalk. She was angry. Her eyes were bright.

"You forgot your hundred," Shayne said.



"I don't want your lousy C-note. Stuff it, til you get me five grand. You can't buy me that cheap. I know plenty I ain't told you." Her eyes blurred moistly.

"Let us drive you to your place," Shayne said softly.

"I just live down the street!" she snapped.

"And we aren't driving anywhere," Rourke said sourly. "Take a look, Mike."

The *Daily News* car was tilted, the left front wheel gone. A siphoning hose dangled from the gas tank. Shayne looked up and down the sidewalk. The loiterers nearby didn't change expressions. The detective whirled, saw the three sharpies skid out of the Red Fish. They moved out fast behind Abigail Galloway. Shayne stared after them. Were they trailing the woman? She turned into another building suddenly, disappeared. The sharpies angled across the street, continued walking.

Shayne went back inside the Red Fish. Rourke already was at the bar, confronting the wizened man. "You mean to tell me you didn't see anyone snapping off that wheel?" Rourke was shouting. "Man, from where you're standing, you could see the street split!"

"I didn't see nothun, mister," Bart said, using the corner of a

match book on his yellow teeth.

Rourke called for a *Daily News* tow truck.

#### IV

WEDNESDAY produced a brilliant morning. Mike Shayne sat slumped slightly in the deep, leather swivel chair, the chair turned so he could look out an office window on the golden cast of the day.

Routine that had piled up while he had been in Minneapolis had been dispensed with and in the outer office Lucy Hamilton was typing a letter. Shayne was conscious of the subdued rhythm of the electric typewriter, but his thoughts were on Tim Rourke and a man named Randolph Foster. Had Rourke contacted Foster? Would Foster consent to talk to a private detective?

Upon leaving the Red Fish the previous afternoon, the detective had weighed what he had been told by Abigail Galloway and had decided to wait for Foster.

He didn't think the *Daily News* was in any immediate danger, and he had no concrete leads to the potential bomber: only a male voice heard on a telephone by a switchboard girl. Attempting to chase down the owner of that voice, with no real lead, would be like trying

to run in deep water. The logical route to the caller at this point was through turning up the Peking Man, and Foster could be the spearhead in that drive.

Abigail Galloway intrigued Shayne. Obviously a woman who thrived on inventing stories about herself, there still could be some truth in her claim that seven footlockers were in the possession of a young swinger named Archibald Jaynes, Jr. Shayne was not yet ready to meet Jaynes headon, and ask to see the lockers. That could tear everything. Jaynes could look the detective square in the eye and tell him to climb a rope straight into the big blue sky. If he'd kept the bones hidden all these years, he wouldn't show them off to a private detective. On the other hand, Foster, another money-man, just might get things moving. Money men had their own language.

So, for the moment, the logical path seemed to lie with a California computer whiz.

Lucy Hamilton interrupted Shayne's thinking with the announcement that Tim Rourke and Randolph Foster were in the outer office. She stood in the entry to Shayne's private sanctuary, engaging in pale yellow, her brown curls glisten-

ing, eyes shining, a soft smile just barely visible at the corners of her unpainted lips. Her expression alerted Shayne. Randolph Foster had impressed her.

Foster was as tall as Shayne but that was where the resemblance ended: Shayne was broad and thick, had knots here and there where bones had mended, and his red hair was slightly ruffled. Foster was slender, probably in his mid-fifties, the detective quietly judged, but he looked toned and agile. His dark eyes were alert, his black and white hair stuck up in a crewcut like brush bristles, and there was a tiny cashew-shaped scar at the corner of his left eye. His clothing was neat, fitted, and quietly expensive.

"Shayne," he said, matching his tone by the firm grip in his handshake. He didn't smile.

"Mr. Foster."

The detective shot a look at Rourke. The snap in Foster's tone seemed to have bordered on being grim. And, looking at the newspaperman, Shayne knew instantly that all was not velvet on this brilliant morning in Miami.

"Mike," Rourke said, sounding as if he had just been whipped, "we went across town this morning to see Abigail Galloway and discovered that she was murdered sometime

during the night. There were cops all over the place."

Foster picked up immediately, "I blame you and Mr. Rourke. I think she was killed because you two went to her yesterday afternoon. You shouldn't have. You were interfering. I may sue the newspaper: breach of silent contract. I placed an anonymous advertisement, that anonymity was offered by the newspaper, it is a service extended, and now—"

"Foster," Shayne said savagely, "shut up!"

Randolph Foster jerked, mild surprise showing on his face. But he suddenly remained silent and Shayne grunted satisfaction.

"Take it from the top, Tim," Shayne said grimly.

Rourke's long face was tight. "I went out to International last night to catch the 11:40 flight from Los Angeles. I had Mr. Foster paged. That brought him to the Information Desk where I introduced myself. He was not happy, but I drove him to The Dolphin, filling him in about the bomb threat and you—and some things about Abigail Galloway. He refused to come see you first thing this morning, rather he demanded to be taken straight to Abigail.

"Okay, no sweat. I figured to phone you while he was talking to Abigail—except there were

cops coming out of the corners around her place, Mike. Abigail had been killed sometime during the night, beaten to death.

"I found an old geezer who lives in the same building and who claims he was her friend. Guy named Charlie Knowles. I got most of my information from him. Charlie says somebody in the building heard a lot of noise in Abigail's place, called the cops, but they got there too late. They found her dead."

"No arrests?" said Shayne.

"No."

The redhead looked at Randolph Foster, said harshly, "You obviously had a change of mind—after a murder. Why are you here now, Mr. Foster?"

Foster had regained composure. "Because I still intend to find the Peking Man, Mr. Shayne. And you can begin by telling me what this Abigail Galloway told you two yesterday afternoon, I'll pay, naturally."

Shayne shot another look at Rourke.

"All I told him was that we had talked to Abigail," Rourke said, "and that she had some information that might interest him. I wasn't passing anything on second-hand. Especially from her, Mike. I think she was a nut."

Shayne grunted. "Investiga-

tive work is a legitimate field, too, Foster. We've got our bums, yeah, cheats, gougers. But I've run into some pretty swift insurance boys, too, brokers who will milk a man dry without shedding a tear, grocers who will sell a bag of potato chips half filled with air. You are in computers, I understand. I guess everybody in your racket is turning out a number one product, huh? No fast buck artists?"

Randolph Foster sat silent.

"Point," said Shayne, "I'm going to pass along what Abigail Galloway told us yesterday afternoon. No fee."

Foster squirmed in his chair. He looked chagrined. "I'd like to hear it," he said. "The Peking Man is very important to me. I'm for all cards on the table, Mr. Shayne."

"Okay," said the redhead. "So let's see what kind of hand you have, Mr. Foster."

## V

RANDOLPH FOSTER had been a Marine, captured by the Japanese in 1941, interned. In the prison camp, he had met a missionary who had seven footlockers in his possession, footlockers filled with human bones. The missionary had told the story of the Peking Man, claimed he had been entrusted

by the Chinese to get the bones to a safe place—Australia, the U.S., anywhere.

Then one day a Japanese officer had come to the camp and ordered the footlockers and the missionary loaded into a truck. A young laborer prisoner had done the loading. He, also, had been put in the truck. That was the last Foster had ever heard of the missionary, the laborer or the bones. But the missionary's story about Peking Man had fascinated him, and later Foster had discovered that such a collection of bones actually existed.

Foster had spent the war in Japanese prison camps, survived and finally had been returned to the United States. After his discharge, he got into computers when they still were brainchildren, and had built a fortune. In time, he had acquired the means to pursue expensive hobbies, his being tracking down seven footlockers of human bones called the Peking Man.

"And about eighteen months ago a source I consider reliable informed me the Peking Man might be in the United States," Foster continued. "My source is a legitimate private collector. He assisted me by contacting other collectors all over the States. He didn't come up with anything concrete, but he con-

tinued to get stories the Peking Man was in the possession of someone in this country. This makes one suspect the bones were lifted from the Japs somewhere along the line, and probably smuggled into the U.S. Legitimate collectors are knowledgeable about the items they seek; they know backgrounds, whether items have been stolen, whether or not they have been passed along through legitimate sales. It appears the Peking Man is being kept underground by someone.

"Anyway, my next step was to place newspaper ads. I've placed them, over the months, in various metropolitan papers, the same ad you saw in the *Daily News*. This is the first reaction I've had."

Shayne used a thumb and forefinger to tug his ear. "Why is the Peking Man so important to you?"

"I'd like to own it," Foster admitted. "But, more important, I want the bones preserved. I've done a great deal of study about their origin, what they mean to the Chinese. I have a houseman in California, a very intelligent man, who has filled me in on Chinese thinking and philosophy about the Peking Man, and I have spent hours with scholars, great Chinese thinkers.

"The Peking Man is very im-

portant to the Chinese people, to history, to the study of man, Mr. Shayne. I am vitally interested in that kind of thing. I want to buy the bones, if it comes down to that. I know, it is said they are priceless, but priceless things can be purchased. But for the moment, I merely want to establish the whereabouts of the bones. I'll deal with the possessor once that is established."

"Well," said Shayne, "I'd say your ad has rippled some water. But I'm also puzzled. Why did it ripple? Look at it this way: assume someone in Miami has the bones. The guy would have to be a cool operator to get them in the first place, legally or otherwise, right?"

"Yes," Foster nodded. "The Peking Man is not something just anyone would or could pick up."

"Okay, if the guy is slick enough to obtain the bones, and if he has kept that possession quiet for any reason why bite on a little Classified ad? Why a bomb threat?"

Neither Foster nor Tim Rourke stirred. Each looked lost in thought.

"Do we assume," continued Shayne, "he is a guy who knows what he has, knows the value, but doesn't know what to do with it—and in the mean-

time doesn't want somebody poking?"

"Perhaps," Foster said slowly.

"And the ad made him nervous?"

Foster remained silent in deep thought.

Shayne shifted in his chair, yanked his ear, lit a fresh cigarette, went down another path. "This missionary, you ever try to trace him?"

Foster nodded, a deep frown creasing his forehead. "A long time ago. His name was Bernard Aikens, he was a Methodist, and probably sixty-five to seventy years old when I met him. Impossible to locate him. I've tried everything. Not surprising.

"Considering the man's age and the fact he said he had been in China more than thirty years at that time, it means he was there when the world was not so large, when record keeping was not so important. Too, any records could have been destroyed in some file cleaning operation somewhere, a fire, almost any way."

"You mentioned another guy at the camp, a laborer. Any information on him?"

Foster's frown deepened. "Yes, he was a young American, a civilian. I never did know his name. He was brought into the camp one day, and the next the Japanese of-



ficer arrived with his truck. Aikens couldn't load the footlockers because of his age, so the young man was ordered to do the lifting. Then he and Aikens were put into the back of the truck, too. That was the last I saw or heard of either of them."

"Could this young guy have been an American engineer?"

"Sure," Foster nodded, his eyes narrowing on Shayne. "He

could have been anything. What made you ask?"

The detective told him Abigail Galloway's story about her son, Howard. Foster nodded repeatedly as he listened. When Shayne had finished, he drew a deep breath. "Well, his name could have been Howard Galloway. I told you, I never did know. And that business about going down the road, being shot and left for dead could have happened. Easily."

"The trouble is," Shayne went on, "Howard Galloway is dead now. He was killed about a year ago by a hit-and-run driver, his mother said."

Foster looked disappointed. "Well, who is Archibald Jaynes? How can I contact him?"

"You've never heard of him?" Shayne asked. "I thought you might have heard the name from your collector friend."

"No," Foster said, shaking his head. "Is Jaynes a collector?"

"I've done some more checking on the Jaynes clan, Mike," Tim Rourke put in. "Archibald Senior and Mrs. Jaynes were killed in the crash of a private plane in Europe about three years ago. Archibald was an investor, big. When you talk about his wealth, you're talking around ten million. Junior is a lone offspring, inherited all. He

hangs his hat in the family mansion and his sole interest appears to be in spending daddy's money. He's not considered a collector of anything—if you eliminate pretty girls and leeches.

"Daddy, on the other hand, dabbled. I don't think a genuine collector would consider him in the fold, but he did seem to have a yen to own things other people said couldn't be had. I'd say that if Archibald Senior got the chance to obtain the Peking Man, legally or illegally, he'd have made his pitch. In other words, he damn well might have picked up those bones somewhere and Junior might damn well be sitting on them today."

Foster stood up abruptly.

Shayne looked up at him from under grizzled brows. "Where the devil are you going?"

"To talk to Mr. Jaynes."

"And drive him into a hole, huh?"

Foster looked puzzled.

"Look, pal, if Jaynes has the bones, and if that possession has been a deep, dark secret all of these years, you figure he's going to trot them out just because you show up at his front door?"

Foster shuffled.

"He'll nosedive," said Shayne.



"He'll go into a hole with the bones and pull the hole in after him."

Foster said firmly, "I tell you, Mr. Shayne, that even so-called priceless things have a price. And I speak from genuine knowledge."

Shayne snorted and waved a hand. "Foster, you're *assuming* Jaynes has the Peking Man. You're going on a name dropped by a woman who got her kicks out of fantasy; she liked to invent stories about herself. Jaynes may never have heard of the Peking man."

"I'll know when I talk to him," said Foster, cooling slightly. "I'll be able...to tell from his reaction."

"There's one factor we haven't discussed yet, Foster. Rourke's paper got a bomb threat because of your ad." Foster's eyebrows rose. "That's right. Now Rourke and I take that threat seriously. It's just possible that whoever has the bones called in the threat. On top of that, an old lady, who answered your ad just got herself killed. Connection? Maybe, maybe not, I want to know. And I want some cooperation from you. We want to work with you on this—all the way. Maybe we can all solve our problems."

"That, of course, depends on how you operate, Mr. Shayne,"

Foster said, turning to the door.

Shayne stood and slammed a fist against the desk top. Rourke jumped. The phone receiver jiggled. An ashtray danced. Foster stopped with a hand on the door knob, stood staring over his shoulder at the redhead.

"Foster," Shayne said savagely, "I figured you for a smart guy. This Archibald Jaynes might be our boy! Our boy! You want him for a bunch of bones! I want to know if he called in a bomb threat! Now we've cooperated with you. You can damn well cooperate with us!"

Foster looked startled.

"We approach him my way!" Shayne continued.

Foster stared.

"You had a reason for placing a blind ad, Mr. Foster," Shayne went on, settling. "You have a reason for valuing anonymity. I don't know what that reason is. I don't care what it is. All I know is, Tim Rourke is sitting here just itching to get at a typewriter. He can turn out a yarn yet today about the California man who is in town looking for the Peking Man."

"That's a threat, Shayne!" Foster said coldly.

"Is it?"

Foster stood shuffling, his face slightly flushed, his eyes hard, those eyes dancing from

Shayne to Rourke, back to the detective. Finally, he released the door knob, turned into the office again. "I don't like this," he said.

"But the anonymity remains important, huh?" Shayne said with a crooked smile that lacked humor.

"Which also seems to have a price," Foster admitted. He suddenly sounded temporarily defeated.

"Why is it important, Mr. Foster?"

"There are those in this world who would do anything to get their hands on the Peking Man. Those bones are that valuable. All right, I'll hire you, Mr. Shayne, if that's what you're after. How much?"

Shayne shot a glance at Rourke. "How much, Tim?"

"The story when all of this is finished," said the newspaperman.

"And I'll take a would-be bomber," said Shayne.

Foster shook his head, looked confused. "I don't understand any of this," he said.

"No sweat, pal," said Shayne. "I want to find a guy who made a phone call. I intend to do exactly that. If I happen to turn up the Peking Man along the way, that's your baby. All yours. Okay?"

Foster stood silent.

"What I don't need is some-

one driving my caller into hiding."

"Then you think—"

"I think," interrupted Shayne, "I'm going to begin with a top cop and a murder."

## VI

THE BLACK CIGAR stub in the corner of an agitated Will Gentry's mouth bobbed as he leafed through the papers in the folder on his desk. Finally he sat back and looked at Randolph Foster, Tim Rourke, and then Mike Shayne. It was obvious he was in a foul mood and had little time for sociabilities. It also was obvious he was curious about Foster, but he didn't ask.

"Abigail Galloway was beaten to death," Gentry said. "Probably with fists and feet. From one person or from a dozen. We haven't determined. She lived on Social Security and Medicare. Maybe she had a little change stashed in her room. Murder for a few bucks sounds lame, but it happens. Anyway, what's your interest in this woman, Mike?"

"She had a son, Howard Galloway. He was a hit-and-run victim about a year ago. Did you ever find the driver?"

Gentry stared hard, then called the computer room, waited, listened, finally hung

up. "We didn't get the driver," he said darkly. "Why?"

Shayne tugged his ear. "Two violent deaths. Maybe there's a connection, maybe not." He told Gentry the story about the Peking Man, the bomb threat, the lead to Abigail Galloway.

Gentry listened in silence, cigar butt flicking, eyes bright, "And?" he said when Shayne finished.

"I might be able to get into this quicker than your people, Will. A lot of noise, and the killer could disappear fast."

"Maybe," Gentry said sourly. "If there really is a connection between Abigail Galloway and the Peking Man. She sounds as if she was a screwball."

"I figure she knew *something* about those bones. Her story about her son and the Jap prison camp and Foster's story dovetail."

"Yeah, there's that," Gentry conceded, eyes narrowing in contemplation. "But I've got a hunch Abigail Galloway, or her son, and this Archibald Jaynes didn't exactly move around in the same social circles. So how did she come up with him?"

"Which is one of the things I intend to find out," Shayne said, standing.

"You don't figure we could?" Gentry said from under a cocked eyebrow.

"Go on," Gentry growled sud-

denly, waving a hand and looking out a window. "See what you can dig up. Just don't get in our way. I've got enough problems this morning. Two patrol cops, on duty—and caught burglarizing a sporting goods store last night. Damn it!"

Shayne, Rourke and Foster, riding three in the front seat, cruised through the brilliant Miami morning in the redhead's convertible. No one talked. Each man was lost in his own thoughts.

Shayne was thinking about Abigail Galloway, and her death. Why had she been killed? Because she had answered a newspaper ad? Because she had talked to a private detective and a reporter? If either or both were true, there was a third, unknown party who must have been watching Abigail. Who?

The redhead searched his mind for candidates. Bart the bartender? The Latin who had been sitting at the bar in the Red Fish and had made a fast departure? The three swifties who had occupied a booth and later had trailed the woman down the street? But what would any of them know about a collection of valuable bones?

So, was there someone else? A mystery man watching from a distance?

Or was Abigail Galloway's

death totally unrelated to the Peking Man?

Shayne's frown deepened and he glanced again at the yellow compact reflected in his rear view mirror. The small car had been behind them for several blocks now, made the same turns, kept the same distance back. Were they being trailed?

Shayne made a right turn, saw the yellow car swing into view again. It was occupied by two men. He made a sudden turn into an alley, watched the yellow car go on past the alley entrance. He stopped, sat twisted in the seat and looking back, waiting for the yellow car to reappear.

"Tail?" Rourke asked.

"Maybe," the redhead grunted.

He backed out of the alley. The yellow car was not in sight. He continued on toward the Red Fish, keeping a sharp eye on his mirror. The yellow car was gone. He had been successful in losing it, or his imagination had been playing tricks.

Bart the bartender became nervous at the mention of Abigail Galloway. He had heard about her murder, but he didn't know any of the details and he didn't want to hear them.

"But you're going to the funeral, aren't you?" Shayne

asked, staring hard at the wizened little man.

Burt flinched, dug deeper into his yellow teeth with the corner of the match book. "What you talkin' 'bout, man?"

"Abigail was a regular in here, wasn't she?"

"Oh...well, yeah."

"And lived just down the street?"

"Yeah...sure."

"This is her neighborhood."

Bart turned to a new corner of the match book, dug into a fresh black crevice in his teeth.

"I just figured all of you neighbors would be going to the funeral," continued Shayne, "especially since Abby didn't have any family."

"So you ain't figurin' right," said Bart.

"She had family?"

Bart looked dumbfounded for a moment, then grunted. "Naw, no kin I know 'bout. You figured wrong 'bout me goin' to any damn funeral. Can't stand them."

"I've been told Abby had a son."

"Yeah, guess so. But he was killed."

"You didn't know him?" Shayne leaned forward.

"I never saw the dude in my life. Only heard 'bout him. Man, how I heard 'bout him!"

"From Abby."

"Tell you true, Shayne," said

Bart, "I never was sure in my mind she really had a son. He could've been just 'nother one of her stories."

"Yeah, I guess she liked to tell tales."

"Oh, Chris! The woman was goofy, I tell you true! She had more wild stories 'bout herself than... well, she was wiggly in the head, tha's all! Man got so he just let her rattle, neyer paid no mind, just let the words go in one ear, out the other."

"Nobody paid any attention to Abigal's talk, huh?" Shayne asked.

"Nobody on this street, tha's sure!"

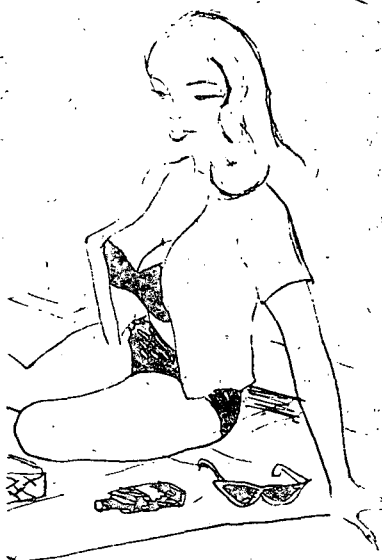
"She ever tell you the one about the Peking Man?"

"Huh? Naw... naw, don't think I heard that one," Bart said.

"Or how she might have a little green dropped on her in the next few days?"

"Yeah... oh, yeah! Now that one I've heard! It's all she was babblin' 'bout recently, how she was gonna be in riches fast, move out of the neighborhood. Yeah, she'd seen this ad in the newspaper and... Chris', I dunno! I turned her off! Although..." Bart hesitated, then almost managed a sly grin.

"...tell you true, Shayne, when you and your newspaper buddy showed here yesterday afternoon, I thought for a second or



two the old gal was on something."

"Just for a second or two, huh?"

"She was nuts!" Bart said.

"Know Charlie Knowles?" Shayne asked suddenly.

"Sure," Bart nodded. "Who don't?"

"I don't."

"Well, him and Abby been sleepin' together. Guess Charlie puts cotton in his ears. Say, maybe Charlie killed her!"

"Why would he?" Shayne asked.

"No reason I know of, tha's sure, but—"

"Charlie and Abby, a couple of December playmates, right?"

Bart simply shrugged.

"Could it be they just happened to have apartments in the same building, were friends?" Shayne asked sarcastically.

"Room," said Bart, missing the sarcasm. "No apartments in that joint. And ain't you heard, man? Abby Galloway invented sex! Made the first dirty flick ever turned out! Was the first girl to pose all nude for a mag! Had this massage joint years ago, long before massage joints ever were heard of. She—"

"Is Charlie Knowles a regular here?" Shayne interrupted.

Bart sobered. "He's a dry gulch. No booze."

"What's his building number?"

"Down the street to the right, 4520, second deck. But you're nuts goin' down there this mornun. There's fuzz all over the place, like moss."

"Somehow they don't frighten me, Bart," Shayne said, turning to the front door. Rourke and Foster fell in beside him. Foster was somber. A twinge of a grin played at the corners of Tim Rourke's mouth.

Then Shayne saw the kid entering the Red Fish. He had been in a booth with two other men the previous afternoon. Now the youth slid into the bar, almost as if he were dodging someone, and then he stopped

short. He stared at Shayne and his eyes and mouth rounded in surprise.

Shayne was immediately alert. The boy stood rooted and stared. It was as if he was anchored. But Shayne sensed that he was near panic.

Shayne leaped forward. The boy yelped and turned to dive out the door. Shayne clamped both huge hands on the back of the boy's jacket and spun him into the interior of the Red Fish.

The boy reeled off balance. Shayne had to dodge around a table, but Rourke had a straight shot at the kid and was moving in. Then the boy went into a crouch and came around fast. He was snarling and Shayne saw the light reflected from metal now clasped in the youth's hand.

The redhead bellowed an alarm. He was too late. Rourke already had made his move. The youth brought the knife blade down in a vicious cutting swipe. Rourke screamed and peeled off, diving across the top of a table and clamping his head with both hands as chairs scattered.

## VII

MIKE SHAYNE went into a crouch, feet widespread, arms up, bent to 45-degree angles at

the elbows, palms flat, fingers spread. The kid was loose, knees flexible, springy, the knife held close to his thigh, his other hand held up, palm out.

His lips were drawn back from very white teeth and dark eyes held a wild gleam. He looked cornered, but not trapped. He never would be trapped as long as he was on his feet and he had that knife in his hand.

Shayne figured he could bring the holstered .45 out from his ribs, open the kid's skull without taking another step. On the other hand, the boy was swift. He could move in fast. Or he might even throw.

Shayne watched the boy's eyes for a telltale hint of his next move. The boy remained balanced on the balls of his feet, crouched, springy. He could go right or left, forward or back, easily. He was experienced. He was waiting for Shayne to make the move: charge or back off.

The boy obviously felt in command now. He was in his kind of fight. He probably had been reared with a knife blade in his hand, and he felt as if he excelled. And it probably was good reasoning. In his mind. He was still alive after twenty-some years, wasn't he?

Shayne inched to his left.

The boy went right. Shayne stepped back. The boy stepped forward, kept the same distance between them. Shayne went to his right. The boy went left. Shayne indicated a step forward. The boy didn't move, crouched slightly lower, sucked a breath, held it. Shayne didn't take the step.

And then from somewhere Randolph Foster yelled: "My God, what—"

The boy flinched. His knife hand went out slightly and his eyes left Shayne for an instant. Shayne faked left and stepped to the right. He brought his hands down to go in low. But the boy leaped in place and brought the knife high, flashing it in a face-high semi-circle. Shayne yanked his nose back from the gleaming tip.

The boy brought the knife back in a reverse slash and then went deeper into his crouch and pointed the tip up toward the detective's abdomen. Shayne backed off, was tempted again by the weight of the .45 on his ribs. He now knew the boy would not throw.

But he wanted the boy alive.

The redhead stood straight suddenly, shoved his hand inside his coat. It brought the boy up. His eyes rounded and spittle formed on his lower lip. It was as if he suddenly realized the redhead might be carrying



a gun. He leaped forward, shot the knife in low. Alley training ground technique had been briefly blunted by surprise.

Shayne grinned savagely, stepped to the right, away from the slash, brought his hands down and clamped the knife wrist. He went down on his knees in a twisting move as he lifted the boy's arm high. His back was into the youth now, and he brought the boy's wrist down sharply. The kid yelled and flipped off to the side, the knife dropping from his fingers.

Shayne went after him, captured the back of his jacket in one hand and the seat of his pants in the other. He pitched the boy straight forward into a booth seat. The boy went headlong, out of control until the top of his skull smashed against the wall. Shayne leaped into the air and came down with an extended knee smashing against the boy's spine. The boy howled and writhed. Shayne caught his hair and yanked his head, keeping his knee jammed down tight.

Then he took out the .45 and jammed the muzzle against the boy's ear. "Talk!" he snarled.

The youth babbled, wiggled. The wiggle was a feeble effort.

Shayne yanked the hair. "Did you kill her?"

"N-not me..." babbled the boy. "Frankie and... Slick."

"Names!" snapped the red-head.

"Frankie... Frankie Booth. Slick Lawrence."

"And you?"

"Danny... Danny Hernandez."

"Where are Frankie and Slick?"

"I dunno!"

"Still in town?" Shayne growled.

"Oh, yeah, man... probably... probably snoozing in their pads! Hey, man, you're hurtin' like hell!"

Shayne drew the boy's head back another inch, kept his knee tight against the spine. "You want a snapped back, Danny?"

"Oh, God, no, man! Look, ease off! You cops ain't supposed to... How'd I know you was fuzz? You was supposed to be the guy with the green stuff... you was in here yesterday, you was flashing bread at her, you went outside with her... and she's been tellin' everybody how she was gonna fall on riches... she's been yacking it up for three days... well, hell, man, we figured you was the Daddy with the loaf... you laid it on her outside... after you walked out of here yesterday... but, man, you're nothin' but fuzz! Just fuzz! Is that the truth, man?"

"You three hit Abby Gallo-

way last night, figuring she had a bundle in her pillow case, huh?"

"Yeah, man... you was supposed to be the man she's been waitin' for! You was supposed to be... but you're only fuzz! Oh, God!"

"What did you turn out, Danny?" Shayne asked.

Hernandez squirmed, remained silent.

Shayne drew his head back another half inch. "Twenty-three smacks!" Hernandez gasped. "I found... it in a cup!"

"You three hit her place. Frankie and Slick worked on Abby while you searched. Is that what you're telling me, Danny?"

"That's it, man! Hey... you're breaking my spine! I think I'm gonna... shāp!" Hernandez groaned.

"They killed her."

"I... heard this morning! I didn't know last night! I didn't even think 'bout it. She wasn't movin' when we skinned out... but that don't have to mean she's dead. Then I'm coming along the street this morning and I hear... I hear she was croaked. I was coming in here to get it straight in my head, and you... you jumped me, man."

"I'm not a cop, Danny," Shayne said.

"Oh... damn!" Hernandez

breathed. "Man, look... you ain't fuzz, and you ain't the bread man... hey, look, so okay, we didn't know! You don't hafta put the heat on me, mister! I don't know nothin' 'bout that old woman, I don't wanna know nothin'. You don't hafta dump me in a swamp, mister! I got a tight mouth!"

"Yeah, you sound like it, Danny. You've already told me who your pals are."

Hernandez groaned, attempted to shake his head. "Jus' leave me alone, huh?" he babbled. "Gimme a second chance!"

"You want to grow up to join the mob, huh?" Shayne snorted.

"Mister, I'm not bad with the knife. You tricked me, yeah, but it's the first time that's ever happened! Honest! I can take care of myself! What I mean is... what I mean is..."

"Take me to Frankie and Slick," the red head growled.

"Huh?" Hernandez looked hopeful. Shayne looked grim.

"We didn't want Abigail Galoway to die. We didn't know, man!"

"But you didn't kill her, Danny."

"Yeah! Tha's right! Frankie and Slick... they laid it on her while I was lookin' for the bread!" The boy was panting.

"So too bad for your friends," Shayne said. "Take me to them, Danny."

## VIII

AN HOUR LATER, seated before a stonefaced Will Gentry in police headquarters, Frankie Booth and Slick Lawrence remained angry and silent. It was not their baptism. Danny Hernandez remained confused. He continued to flick periodic looks at Shayne. "I thought... I thought..."

"Will?" said Shayne.

Gentry waved a hand. "Rourke got a cut ear, that's all?"

"We dropped him off at an emergency clinic. He bled, but he's okay."

"I'll talk to you later—and thanks, Mike."

Shayne and Randolph Foster turned out of the office, then Danny Hernandez shrieked, "Shayne, you lied to me! You made me think..." He didn't finish it.

"Welcome to the real world of crime, kid," Shayne snapped.

Outside police headquarters, Randolph Foster shook his head. He seemed awed. "Did those three really beat the woman to death with fists?"

"And probably feet," Shayne grunted, sliding into the convertible.

"Is this..." Foster paused, then finished, "how murder is solved? Is it always this easy?"

"There are no mysteries to

most murders, Foster," the red-head said, piloting the convertible into street traffic. "People talk. Self preservation is a heluva thing. You accuse one guy, he tells you about another buy. Pretty soon you have a killer. Anyway, most murders are domestic, no sweat."

Foster went silent for several blocks. Finally he straightened in the car seat and looked around. "Are we returning to the Red Fish?"

"I want to yak it up a bit with Charlie Knowles. He and Abigail Galloway apparently were close friends. She could have confided in him about your Peking Man."

"Oh?" Foster considered it, then said, "Does this mean you are going to start looking for the collection now? I mean, since you've solved..."

"It means," Shayne said, "I'm still working on the theory that if I turn up those bones I may also turn up a would-be bomber."

The police had vacated the murder scene. But Charlie Knowles was at home in his room, and he answered Shayne's knock immediately. A short, slight man, he stood holding the door and cocked his head slightly in curiosity. He was aged, his shirt and trousers were threadbare, but he was neat, freshly shaven, and his

eyes were bright with awareness.

After Shayne had explained his presence, Charlie Knowles ushered him into a room that was large, airy, cheaply furnished, but clean. Shayne noticed the diamond stickpin and the black snap-brim hat on a dresser that had a cement block for one leg, and he thought that if Charlie Knowles had possessed a few bucks he might be a chipper Dapper Dan.

"You say the murderers of Abigail have been apprehended?" Charlie Knowles asked, seeking confirmation.

"They are in the custody of the police," Shayne repeated.

Knowles shook his head, sat on the edge of a lumpy bed. He waved a hand to the only two chairs in the room. Shayne sat on the edge of one, Foster folded into the other.

"They killed for twenty-three dollars," Knowles said, still wagging his head. "It is difficult to accept."

"They had more like five thousand in mind," Shayne replied.

Knowles looked up. "I assume you are referring to the classified ad that appeared this week in the *Daily News*."

"Un-huh," Shayne nodded.

"You know," said Knowles reflectively, "I was a newspaper



printer once. It was my life's work. But the computers came into being and annihilated the printing profession. It's all done by buttons now. But—to Abby: I've known her for approximately eight years, ever since I moved in here. She already was here. We became friends the first day. I liked her. She probably should have lived in a past century, but she didn't.

"By that, Mr. Shayne, I mean she could have been a woman of grandeur. She could have carried it off. Instead, she lived in this century and her means did not provide. So she invented. I liked that about her. I sat for hours and listened to her stories, and I enjoyed every one of them."

He stopped and gave Shayne a sharp look. "For one thing, they helped keep my mind off my own troubles."

"This ad in the newspaper," Shayne pressed. "Do you really think she knew something about the Peking Man, Mr. Knowles?"

He nodded. "She became very excited the first day she saw the ad. Abby read the Classifieds, understand. Daily. I taught her that. I told her: 'Abby, if you are a newspaper reader, read the Classifieds. There is more human life, more happiness, more sadness, more huckstering, in Classifieds than in any other column of a newspaper.'

"Anyway, Abby was an avid reader of Classifieds, so it was no surprise that she saw this ad about the Peking Man. The surprise to me came with her excitement. She vowed she would have the offered five thousand dollars within this week. I admit, after listening to her story about her son, Howard, I thought she might have a chance for a thousand or so. I didn't think she could claim the entire five thousand. She really didn't have that much information. But a thousand? Maybe. It depended on the person who placed the ad."

"Why couldn't she go for the whole bundle?" Shayne asked.

Knowles waved a limp hand. "You heard her story, Mr. Shayne. And, from your explanation when you arrived at my door, I gathered you saw through Abby, too—as most people did, eventually. Anyway, she was mixing again, taking a small portion of fact about the Peking Man and stirring it with a large portion of fantasy. Howard, I think, probably was in a Japanese prison camp, probably did meet this missionary, probably was put in a truck with the bones, probably was shot, left for dead."

Knowles hesitated, wagged his head, then continued, "But as for someone named Archibald Jaynes who supposedly lives here in Miami and who supposedly possesses these same bones today, well, Mr. Shayne, how would Abby know an Archibald Jaynes? Especially if he is a man of the financial stature she claimed. And how would she know he has the bones? Okay, maybe there is an Archibald Jaynes, maybe the man collects bones, how would Abby know those bones are what is called the Peking Man? Do you see, Mr. Shayne? There are just too many 'Hows?'"

"You ever meet her son, Mr. Knowles?"

"He came here twice to see her in the eight years I knew

Abby. And that isn't right, is it? A son living in the same city and not making frequent visits with his mother. . .

"Did she visit him?"

"Oh, yes."

"Where?"

"At the bowling alleys. Take a hundred of them, Mr. Shayne. Pick one. Howard worked there at one time or another. Never for long, understand, but he worked in bowling alleys."

"How about the last one, Mr. Knowles?"

"The Let Her Roll. That's original, isn't it?"

"When was this?" Shayne asked.

"He was working there at the time of his death. He was leaving there at night, crossing the street when he was run down. It happened around one o'clock in the morning."

"Know where the place is?" Shayne asked.

"I didn't, I don't. And I'm not even sure if the alley exists anymore. All I know about Howard Galloway is we buried him, Abby and me. There wasn't anyone else at the funeral. Not even his friend. Just Abby and me. We pooled our Social Security that month, buried the boy. We didn't eat too well for a while afterward, but we buried him. Abby needed the help, Mr. Shayne. She liked her son. I didn't."

"I haven't figured you," said Shayne.

Knowles suddenly looked surprised. "What?"

"You and Abby Galloway."

"Oh, you mean those stories you hear up and down the street?" Knowles chuckled.

"No. Abby dipped in sauce. You, I'm told, don't. I don't get the—"

Knowles nodded, "I had my day, Mr. Shayne. I put many a groove in a brass rail. Abby's day just came later than mine, that's all."

"You are a tolerant man."

Knowles laughed softly, waved a hand around the room. "Take a look. I've known better days. I can live or I can dive off a highrise. I decided a long time ago."

Shayne stood. "A moment ago you mentioned a friend of Howard's who didn't show up at the funeral."

"Yes," Knowles nodded. "A man named Ray Burlington. I think he and Howard might have roomed together at one time. Abby occasionally mentioned him."

"You know if this Burlington is still around?"

Knowles shrugged. "No."

"Okay, thanks, Mister Knowles."

Knowles stood, continued to smile. "I like you, Mr. Shayne. I wish we could have known

one another a few years ago. I think we might have dented a brass rail or two together."

"Know something, pal," Shayne said with a genuine grin, "I think you are entirely correct."

"Mr. Knowles?" Randolph Foster had taken a wallet from an inside coat pocket. He sifted bills from the wallet, placed the bills in a stack near the black snap brim hat on the dresser.

"I assume," he said, "you will see to it that Mrs. Galloway has a proper service."

Knowles looked crafty. "You the man who placed the ad?"

"I am the man."

Knowles fingered the bills, looked at Foster. "I hope you find your Peking Man someday, mister."

"I will," Foster vowed quietly.

Shayne and Foster returned to the sidewalk where the sunshine was brilliant and the day had taken on heat. Shayne caught the movement of the small yellow car in the corner of his eye and he stopped abruptly.

"What's the matter?" Foster wanted to know.

"Nothing," the redhead scowled, watching the yellow compact pull away from the curbing down the street and disappear as swiftly as a shark around a corner.

## IX

MIKE SHAYNE used a friend at the telephone company to get an address for a bowling alley called the Let Her Roll, which no longer had a listing or existed. The friend had to do some digging in computer records and Shayne grunted when he got the former address. It figured. The Let Her Roll had been in a neighborhood where survival after dark was a neat trick.

The detective sat in the front seat of his car and stared at the boarded front of the former bowling alley. Beside him, Foster stirred. "We are wasting time, Shayne. What do you expect to find here?"

The detective didn't answer.

Shayne left the car and moved across the sidewalk. A young Negro who had been leaning against the front of the boarded building flicked the redhead a startled glance and started off down the sidewalk.

"Hold it!" snapped Shayne, palming a five dollar bill.

The youth was wary. It was obvious that Shayne's hulk and dogged movement warned him. On the other hand, money, any kind of money, was a strong temptation.

"Know a Ray Burlington?" said Shayne.

He saw a light flicker in the



youth's eyes. The boy shuffled.

"Yeah. . . maybe."

Shayne held up the bill.

The boy said, "Out back."

"You lead," said Shayne.

The boy hesitated. "Would I con you, man?"

"You might."

He hadn't. There was a door in the back of the building. Shayne knocked. The door opened under his large fist and the detective inventoried a medium-statured, unclean man of some thirty years. The man had a murky complexion and wore dirty jeans and tennies and an old red knit shirt. A purple discount store baseball cap was stuck on the back of his head.

"Ray Burlington?"

"No," growled the man. He moved the door toward the detective.

Shayne stuck a foot against the door and moved into the dank room behind the door. There was a small bed in one corner, a rickety table and two chairs, a single lamp and the stink of mildew. The man stood near the bed. He looked apprehensive.

"So I'm Burlington," he said.

"So I'm clean!"

"Howard Galloway."

"Huh?" Burlington jerked, yanked at the baseball cap. "Hey, man, Howie went down 'bout a year 'go! What gives?"

"You and Howie were pals."

"Well. . . we chummed a little, yeah. I mean. . . Howie was an old man compared to me, but we got along, yeah. But he got killed. Some bastard in a heap knocked him off—and you cops didn't even bother to look for who done it!"

"Where did it happen?"

"Out front! Don't you know?"

"You see the accident, Ray?"  
Shayne snapped.

"Naw."

"Was Howie working here at the time?"

"Yeah!" Burlington said.

"You too?"

"Sure—we was bunkin' back here! There was. . . another bed then. I. . . I tossed it out after Howie got knocked off."

"You keep saying Howard Galloway was knocked off, Ray. You figured he was murdered?"  
Shayne asked sharply.

"Naw, naw, naw. . . you're gettin' the wrong drift! Knocked off. . . that's an expression. . . just an expression!"

"What are you doing these days?"

"I manage," Burlington said.

"A liquor store here, a gas station there, a—"

"Man, I never hit a store in my life! Hey. . ." He stopped, stared at Shayne. "You ain't fuzz?"

"I don't know. Am I?"

Ray Burlington continued to stare. Then he snorted and sat on the edge of the bed. "Naw, you ain't fuzz, Red. You've got heat on you. I see it under your arm, but you ain't fuzz. You don't know my pedigree. I'm a genuine house man, nothin' else, Red. What's your pitch? How come all this crap about Howie?"

"You and Howie a team when he was alive?" Shayne said.

Burlington squinted, became stubborn as he regained confidence. "You didn't give me your pitch."

"Eye."

"Shamus?" Burlington cocked one eyebrow. "And your friend?"

"Partner."

"What do you two want?"

"Howie and you—a team a couple of years ago?"

"You gotta be kiddin', man! Howie couldn't lift a glass to drink water without droppin' it. He was muscle. Nothin' else. He was as thick in arm and butt as between his ears. And that's it, Red. We're through rappin' until I see some color."

Shayne got out his wallet, rifled bills for Ray Burlington to see. "Depends," the redhead said.

Burlington considered. "Okay, so lay a few questions on me, let's see where we go."

"Howie Galloway hired out as private muscle?"

"There's always a job around," Burlington nodded, and added, "for you big guys."

"Howie was a large man?"

"Very large, Red. Not very swift of foot, else he never woulda got knocked down by that heap, but very large. When he leaned against a building it was with his elbow on the third deck." Burlington chuckled. "That's a bit of humor."

"Galloway once was a construction engineer, I understand," Shayne said.

Burlington almost smiled. "Long ago, he told me, he worked for some buildin' outfit in China, some Godforsaken place like that. I dunno, I forget. Anyway, he claimed he once was captured in a war by the Japs, said he escaped. Maybe he did, maybe it all was a lot of crap, I dunno. But I do know one thing: Howie weren't no engineer. He was a ditch-digger!"

"So maybe a little of his mother's sense of grandeur wore off on him, huh?" Shayne said.

"Huh?"

"Forget it." Shayne yanked at his earlobe. "You work houses. Ever hear of a guy named Archibald Jaynes?"

Burlington stirred on the

edge of the bed, suddenly found something interesting on the concrete floor. Nerve ends were flicking at him now. He fidgeted. Finally he said, "You promised bread, man!"

"Spill!" Shayne grated.

"Okay, okay. Nobody has to get excited. It ain't no big deal anyway. So I hit this Jaynes place. It's a big place, spread out all over hell, it should be ripe picking. Only it ain't. I get a statue, a tiny little statue of some kind and then bells start ringin' all over the joint. I gotta cut."

"Come on, man," said Shayne carefully. "You can do better than that."

Burlington twisted his hands together. "Well, there was one thing. I seen these boxes—footlockers, they was. At least, that's what I think they was. I seen a line of 'em, and I was gonna have a look, but then them damn bells went off, and... well, later, I was tellin' Howie 'bout them, the lockers, and he surprised hell outta me. He got all curious, wanted to know 'bout them lockers."

"Trouble is I couldn't tell him a damn thing, except they did have this funny little thing, like a dragon, painted on one end, and... anyway, that's what got Howie excited, and he said maybe him and me was gonna get a big pot of gold fast. Then



he went out to see this Jaynes cat the next day, wouldn't tell me how come he was so excited, just went out there, and then—

"Well, it was that night Howie got knocked off by the heap, so I never did find out what in hell got him jumpin' like a rubber ball. That's it, Red. That's the Jaynes caper. You couldn't get it better on film—and it's gotta be worth fifty, huh?"

"You didn't see Howie after he had talked to Jaynes?"

"Nope, I ain't even sure he seen Jaynes. I mean, you know,

that's a big spread out there. I don't figure the gates is open to—"

"How come you didn't talk to Howie?" Shayne asked.

"Well... 'cause that afternoon the fuzz picked me up on a bumper! There was a place over on the Northside got hit. The fuzz started pointin' fingers at me. But it weren't me. Hell, I was on the Southside, working the Jaynes layout... 'course I couldn't say nothin' 'bout that, so I had to sleep that night in the slammer. And that's the night Howie got knocked off."

"Anybody ever tried to hit you, Ray?"

"Huh?"

"Since your friend Howard Galloway was killed?"

"Now. That's crazy. Why the hell—"

"Maybe Howie was murdered," Shayne interrupted.

"Huh?"

"Because he asked questions about the footlockers."

"Oh, come on!" Burlington grinned, unbelieving.

"You ever tell anyone else about those lockers?"

"No!"

"Sure about that?" Shayne insisted.

"Positive, man!"

"Okay." Shayne put his wallet away. "But keep sharp eyes, huh?"

Burlington leaped to his feet. "Hey, man, you owe me!"

Shayne said, "We're going out to see Archibald Jaynes, and, of course, we'll have to tell him how we got on him. Now, if it just happens Archibald Jaynes doesn't want people knowing about his footlockers, doesn't want people coming around asking questions, if it just happens Archibald Jaynes might have a few connections in the underworld, can get a job done with a phone call, and if we happen to drop your name while we're talking to him, Ray, and—"

"Red, you're scum!" Ray Burlington shrilled, going down on his knees and yanking a scuffed suitcase out from under the sagging bed.

"You got to take the bad with the good in this world," Shayne said philosophically. He stopped in the doorway, looked back at Burlington. "You also can look at it from the standpoint of being lucky. You're getting a chance to put miles between you and Miami."

Ray Burlington spit. The spittle landed very near Shayne's toe.

X

OUTSIDE the room, Mike Shayne slipped the convertible keys into Foster's palm and growled

out of a corner of his mouth, "Walk natural around to the car, drive down the street a couple of blocks, circle around and watch for me."

Foster looked startled. "Wha—"

"Burlington isn't flying," said the redhead, looking at the building walls around him. He spotted a fire ladder he could reach. "I didn't scare him. The suitcase business was fake. What did you see in that room he could put in a suitcase?"

"But—"

"He's a house man, Foster. That means he burglarizes homes. Okay, a guy steals to possess, use or sell. Burlington is interested in owning only one thing: dough. So he sells. Which means he has a fence, maybe three or four, but he's got one, a mainliner somewhere, a guy he always goes to first with his merchandise.

"Now, get rolling. Take a drive. Burlington sees my heap out front, he'll go to an ice cream parlor. He isn't stupid. Get the car out of sight. When you come back watch for both of us. If you see Burlington walking along the sidewalk, cut off again, get behind us if you can. I'll want the car if Burlington suddenly whistles for a cab."

"But...but..."

"Move, man! Do I tell you

how to slap together computers?"

Foster cut, walking fast. He didn't look back. Shayne caught the bottom rungs of the fire ladder, hoisted himself, went up the ladder to the roof. He was only three stories off the ground. He started to move to the front of the building to watch Foster cut out, but then he heard a scraping sound below him. He looked over the parapet, saw Ray Burlington shuffling out to the alley. Burlington stopped, looked around. Shayne knew he was seeking eyes.

Burlington took off. He seemed satisfied. He went down the alley to the street. Above him, Shayne trailed quietly. Burlington stopped again, looked up and down the sidewalk, went out to the curbing, inventoried the street in both directions. He moved out.

Shayne dashed to the back of the building, went over the side and down the ladder. He ran out of the alley to the sidewalk, saw Burlington far ahead now and moving fast.

Shayne looked for Foster, didn't spot the car. He cursed. Burlington had swung into the street suddenly, flagged a cab. Helplessly, Shayne watched Burlington dive into the cab and the cab move out.

Foster came out of a side-

street ahead of Shayne, waved frantically to the detective. The redhead bolted. Foster had pulled into the street, had the car facing the right direction. He slid over to the passenger side and waited for Shayne. The detective rolled in behind the steering wheel and moved out with a surge of power.

"Good work!" he said.

Foster said nothing, stared ahead. Shayne caught sight of the cab he wanted and eased off on the accelerator. This was going to be a difficult tail job. The cab already was rolling toward a residential area. There would be very little street traffic and a trailing automobile would be all too easy to spot.

Then the cab turned into a sidestreet. Shayne rolled across the intersection, saw the cab braked at a curbing. He parked the car, hurried back to the intersection. The cab was gone. Had Burlington pulled a swift one on him? Was he now moving out in the cab, laughing?

Foster joined Shayne. "What are we doing?" He sounded totally puzzled.

"Let's take a walk," growled the redhead.

They walked along the sidewalk to the house where the cab had been braked. It was a small, square place, neat. There was a small sign in the

yard that said: *Custom Cabinet Work. Ask Inside.*

Beside the house, a drive went to the back of the lot and another square building. Shayne moved cautiously along the drive.

"What are you looking for, Shayne?" Foster wanted to know.

"Burlington."

"But I thought we were attempting to trail him without being seen."

"If he's here," Shayne said heavily, "he's taken us to where I wanted to go. I don't care if he does see us now."

Foster said nothing. He obviously was deeply puzzled.

Shayne heard the sound of a saw coming from the square building. He went to a window, shaded his eyes, looked inside. He saw Ray Burlington talking avidly to a man who was carefully using an electric handsaw on a large sheet of paneling. The saw sliced relentlessly through the wood. A saw blade with that kind of power could split a man's skull in seconds.

Shayne looked at Foster. "It's a workshop. A guy also could be fencing from here. Burlington is inside. Come on, let's see if we can stir some answers."

Shayne banged on the door of the building with a large fist, and Burlington called out, "It's open, shamus. Come on in."

The redhead grunted and looked at Foster over his shoulder. "So we were brought here. I thought Burlington made it easy for us to follow. Well, there has to be a reason. Let's go."

The two men inside stood side by side, facing the door. The electric saw had been turned off. Shayne glanced around the open room. Cabinets in various stages of construction were scattered around. Behind Burlington was a workbench and an air-powered stapling gun, various other small wood tools.

Burlington's friend had ex-con written all over him. He was a macabre looking guy, thick in shoulder, trunk and leg. He had a concaved forehead and shallow cracks marked his cheeks. He also held a small gun in his fist and the muzzle was pointed at the detective and Foster.

"Come on in," Shayne," he said. "Bring your pal. Kick the door shut. The name's Ace Hart."

Shayne and Foster entered.

Ace Hart wiggled the gun, squinted as he inventoried the redhead. "Damn, but you're a big one. So you're Shayne, huh? Heard of you. Here and there, that is. Who's your friend? And don't hand me that bull 'bout partner. I've heard enough





'bout you, snooper, to know you're a loner."

"Put the heat away, Ace," Shayne said flatly. "All we're after from you is a little information."

Hart grinned, hefted the gun. The grin was twisted, lacked humor. "Me too. Like how come you're interested in a guy who's been dead a year? How come you wanna know 'bout a joint Ray here hit a long time ago? What's this jazz 'bout some footlockers? What—"

"Ace," Shayne interrupted, "I was hoping you could help, but if we're going to play cute with one another...well, nobody wins, right?"

"Nobody wins, tha's a fact," Ace Hart admitted, nodding.

"You knew Howie Galloway?"

"Naw."

"But you heard about him."

"Yeah, sure...he was Ray's pal." Ace Hart said.

"You figure Galloway was hit?"

"Could be. Dunno, don't really care. Is that how come you came 'round to my friend Ray today? You think he might know something 'bout Galloway gettin' knocked off? Why would anyone bump Galloway? Did it have somethun to do with these footlockers you was askin' Ray 'bout?"

Shayne sighed. "I can see,

friend, we're playing cute again or you are fishing."

"No fishing, Shayne," Ace Hart said flatly. "I don't know what the hell is going on—but I'm all of a sudden interested in a bunch of footlockers, I think."

"See you 'round, Ace."

"Move an inch, shamus—and your friend is dead."

Shayne froze.

Ace Hart waved the gun. "Bring 'em over here, Ray."

Burlington moved in behind Shayne and Foster, shoved each. They moved toward Ace Hart. He used the gun to motion Foster toward the saw table. Ray Burlington propelled Foster forward. Ace kept the gun on Shayne, snapped on the electric handsaw.

"Hold the guy's hand on the table, Ray," Ace graveled. "Spread his fingers."

Burlington slapped Foster's hand on the table, held his arm.

"Now," said Ace Hart, "I wanna know 'bout them footlockers. How come they're so valuable? What's in them?"

He moved the handsaw toward Randolph Foster's extended fingers. His eyes danced between the fingers and Shayne. Then Foster yelped in fright and the sound captured Ace Hart for a couple of seconds.

Shayne leaped, slammed a

forearm across Ace Hart's gun-hand, knocking the gun aside. He whipped a fist into Ace Hart's groin. Hart yelled and dropped the handsaw. Shayne heard Foster scream in pain. The redhead whirled, whipped up the stapling gun. He jammed it against Ace Hart's thigh, yanked the trigger. There was an odd sound.

Ace Hart went up on his toes, his face registering surprise and dismay, and then he yelled and plunged to the floor and caught his thigh and writhed.

Shayne turned with the staple gun just as Ray Burlington came down from flight. Burlington had leaped at him. Shayne triggered a staple into Burlington's shoulder, spun aside. Burlington bounced off, went to the floor with a high-pitched scream.

Shayne pitched the staple gun aside, lunged to Foster. Foster clamped his right hand with his left. Blood oozed through the fingers of his left hand.

The detective carefully pried Foster's left hand open. All of the fingers on the right hand remained intact. There was a slice across the outside of his palm.

Shayne grunted relief. "Okay, let's roll, Foster. There'll be a hotel doctor at the Dolphin."

## XI

THE HOTEL DOCTOR took Foster into a private cubicle. Mike Shayne grunted satisfaction. He'd been waiting for this opportunity. He eased out of the hotel quickly. Foster would be angry, but Foster was not paying the detective's tab—and the redhead had decided he could move more efficiently without a rookie accomplice.

The Jaynes' mansion sparkled in the late afternoon sunshine. It might have been a low-slung fishing lodge. It was large, sprawling, rustic looking, with an expensive veneer. There were flowers and green things in the vast yard. Balconies on the front of the house overlooked the parking areas and the gleaming array of scattered station wagons and sports cars.

Shayne sat in his braked car for a moment, scowling. So many cars around. Party time at the Jaynes abode? He figured he would prefer to have Archibald Jaynes alone.

"Hi."

Shayne looked over his shoulder. The girl stood behind him. She lounged against the car, head cocked in curiosity. She looked mid-twenty, wholesome and perkily in a yellow-white ponytail worn absurdly long. Her attire was simple:

blouse and jean shorts. Obviously no more. She was braless and barefooted.

"Mike Shayne," said the detective with a grin.

"New," said the girl speculatively. "And older," she added.

"Came out of nowhere," nodded Shayne.

"Don't we all," said the girl.

"Ada here."

"Hi, Ada."

"Hi, Mike."

"Archie around?" Shayne asked.

"Yeah, somewhere."

"Getting ready for the blast, huh."

"What blast, man?" Ada said.

"Cars," Shayne said, waving his hand.

"Oh... just the regulars, man," said Ada. "Like you. Now if you become a regular, one more car, see?"

"Got it. Everybody kinda floats in and out, right?"

Ada waved an arm. "This is the scene, man. No pressures. Friends come, friends go, you never know. That's how Archie figures it."

"Archie's a pretty groovy cat, okay," Shayne nodded.

"You gonna be around for a few days?" Ada asked.

"I don't know."

"I hope you are," said Ada. "You've kinda got an air about you. Archie's inside—by the indoor pool."

Shayne got out of the car, stood tall.

"God Almighty," breathed Ada, "they make 'em that big?"

And then she went between cars and down the slight slope of the green lawn toward the front fence. Shayne watched her tight young hips work. She didn't look back. He turned to the mansion, went to the wide open front door. He stepped inside to vast elegance. No one greeted him; no one was in sight. He heard voices from somewhere, looked into expensively furnished rooms, didn't find anyone.

He wandered into the middle of the mansion, found a small indoor swimming pool. There was a cluster of humanity at the far end of the pool: two girls, five boys hovering around a long young man who was sprawled on a webbed layback chair. The group seemed to look up in unison with Shayne's arrival. No one moved for several seconds.

And then the young man on the chair sat up and the group parted. The man probably was in his late twenties. He was trim, had straight-browed good looks, smooth dark skin and predatory eyes, long styled brown hair. Those around him were of different colors, skin tones, eyes, hair, but there was a carbonness about all of them.

including a hungry, unsatiated air of restlessness and a slightly megalomaniac manner.

Shayne made a quick decision. He had to dominate. He took out the .45, fired a shot into the pool water, then stood bouncing the large gun in his palm, waiting.

No one moved until the young man on the webbed chair said, "I think the gentleman desires to discuss something with me alone, group. So everybody to their own thing. Outside. Okay?"

Only a black-haired girl remained with the young man. She was indolent and ripe, defiant in snap of eyes and manner.

"Kitty," the young man on the chair said gently. He patted her hip.

She left. She was reluctant. Shayne would not have trusted her behind him. But she disappeared through a door on the opposite side of the open area and he kept an eye on the archway as he said, "You are Archibald Jaynes?"

"And you have intruded," nodded the young man. "Why?"

Shayne fired a direct statement. "The Peking Man."

Jaynes stood suddenly. He was rigid.

"And a bomb threat to the Daily News."

Jaynes said stiffly, "You



found your way in, find your way out. Now!"

"You don't want to show me those footlockers?"

"Who are you, man?"

"Mike Shayne, private investigations."

"Ahh." Jayned leaped into the swimming pool, stood defiant. "Shoot me down now, man."

Shayne stared at Archibald Jaynes for a moment, then plopped the .45 into its rig, turned and walked out of the mansion. Everyone seemed to have disappeared. He seemed totally alone as he left. He went to his car, walked around

the hood—and heard the motor of a sports car leap alive.

The car catapulted at him. He launched himself over the side of his car and yanked in his feet. When he straightened, the sports car was gone. But he had had a glimpse of the driver. It was the girl, Kitty.

Then Shayne heard laughter. He twisted and looked up at balconies across the front of the Jaynes mansion. There was a gallery of young people. They applauded and shouted "Bravo!" as he got into the front seat and headed out of the grounds.

Shayne was angry, too angry. Two blocks from the Jaynes place he pulled into the curbing and parked, shut off the motor of the car, slouched behind the wheel, letting himself cool off. He sat in the early evening Miami sun, pounding the steering wheel.

A cab approached. He saw the cab slow. Then he saw Randolph Foster. The cab stopped. Foster was leaning out the back window. Foster paid off the cabbie, joined Shayne. His right hand was bandaged.

"You deserted me," said Foster. "But I had a suspicion this is where I would find you. Is Jaynes available?"

"Yeah," grunted Shayne. "He's sitting in the middle of a swimming pool."

"Wh-at?" Foster was startled.

"He defied me to shoot him between the eyes."

"Shayne!"

"Foster," Shayne said grimly, "he's got the footlockers. I didn't see any, but he has some. They may contain what you are after, they may not. The way I've got Jaynes figured at the moment is, he has a priceless object, he inherited it from his father, he could care less about the object itself, but he is hanging on to it for security.

"I don't know how much his pappa left him. Maybe he can't go through it in a normal lifetime. But if he thinks there is that possibility, he wants those bones, and he wants the fact that he has them kept quiet. After all, if he runs through one fortune, the Peking Man could provide him another someday."

"Shayne," Foster said, "take me to Archibald Jaynes. All I really want to know at the moment is does he have what is known as the Peking Man? Everything else can be handled appropriately later."

"I think," said Shayne, suddenly alert again, "You are getting your answer." He kept a sharp eye in his rear view mirror. The two station wagons whisked past, back ends low, hoods riding high off the front wheels.

Foster looked confused.

"Those wagons," Shayne said.

"I saw both at the Jaynes' place. Do they look loaded?"

"With footlockers?" Foster gapped.

"It could be," Shayne said, "Jaynes is getting nervous. Maybe he has decided to move the lockers to another location until he knows exactly what is going on."

"Follow them!" Foster shouted.

Shayne moved out, keeping the station wagons in sight. He wasn't sure what he would do if they split, one going north, the other going south. And then the blue sedan appeared in his rear view mirror and he forgot about the split as the sedan with the four Orientals swung around him and powered its way up ahead of the station wagons.

The flash of fire across the street in front of the wagons was the trigger...

"Flame throwers!! yelled Shayne, riding the skid of the car into the curbing.

He peeled out, used the door for a shield, levelled the .45.

## XII

THE TWO station wagons were pressed against the curbing. Two young men scrambled out of each, stopped dead in the

street as the wall of fire disappeared and four Orientals pushed into view.

One of the Orientals stepped forward. He was short and round, well-dressed and carried an air of quiet toughness and confidence.

"Hop!" breathed Foster.

Shayne shot him a quick glance.

"Brother of my houseman," said Foster. "What's he doing here?"

Shayne had a clear recollection of a yellow compact car. "Foster, I've got a hunch you were tailed from California."

Foster thought about it, then sagged. "Yes. Of course, entirely possible. The Peking Man is very important to the Chinese. And—even though my intention might be good—I am *not* Chinese."

Foster moved out around the shield of the car door. "Hop?"

The Chinaman waved a hand. "Please remain where you are, Mr. Foster," he said politely. "We have very little time. I am truly sorry about all of this, but the Peking Man is very valuable to those of us from Taiwan who still have families in Red China. It is a tremendous bargaining tool. I hope you will understand."

One of Archibald Jaynes' leeches waved a limp hand and said, "Hey, man, ain't we got

anything to say about all of this?"

Hop looked at his friends. A sheet of flame shot out of a gun, bounced off the street, sent Archibald Jaynes' crew scattering.

Hop waved a hand again. An Oriental got into each station wagon, moved out, disappeared.

"Hop," Shayne said crisply, "you're stealing."

"The cars will be returned to the mansion within two hours. Neither will be damaged."

"How about the bones?"

Hop said, "The bones are another matter, Mr. Shayne. For the moment, we will remove them for safekeeping. There will be a day in court. Mr. Jaynes will have his chance to claim ownership if he cares to come forward. He also will have his chance to tell how he came to possess the Peking Man."

Shayne looked at Foster. The computer man looked sour. "So what's your problem?" asked Shayne. "I thought you told me your real interest was in preserving the bones. You don't think Hop is going to—"

Hop interrupted, "Mr. Foster has another reason for wanting the Peking Man, Mr. Shayne. Mr. Foster wants to sell computers in China. That's Red China. Negotiations are pending. Of course, if he could offer

the return of the Peking Man, he might be in an excellent bargaining position."

Shayne whirled and returned to his car.

"Where are you going?" Foster called out.

Shayne waved a hand. "Look Foster, my work with you is over. You know where your bones are, but I still have a few loose ends to tie up. Like a guy who phoned in bomb threats to a newspaper. I have a hunch my friend Will Gentry's going to want to have a talk with a certain Archibald Jaynes. If he hasn't skipped. I don't think he has. I've got a helluva big suspicion about where I can find him—in the middle of a swimming pool, if he hasn't moved.

"And Foster, let this be a lesson to you. If you get too sharp, you can cut yourself."

Leaving a crestfallen Foster beside the highway, it took Mike Shayne only a few minutes to retrace the route to the Jaynes estate.

Archibald Jaynes was standing in front of the mansion, still in his swimming trunks. He seemed surprised to see Mike Shayne pull up. "So what do you want, Shamus," he said as Shayne's car pulled alongside him.

There was fear in Jaynes' eyes. As Shayne didn't say anything but continued to look at



the small man, Jaynes backed away. "You..." Jaynes started to say, and then broke off into a choked silence.

Shayne gave a grunt of disgust. "Jaynes," he said, "You've lost your bones. I was going to turn you over to Gentry for phoning in that bomb threat to the *Miami News*. But you know what, Jaynes? You're just too

small. You're a little frog in a little pool. I'm going to leave you there."

"You...you can't prove..." Jaynes stuttered.

Shayne grinned and shook his head. "I don't have to. I don't even want to." His car scattered gravel as Mike Shayne gunned out of the drive.

---

## NEXT MONTH'S TWO GREAT HEADLINERS:

### DOORWAY TO DEATH

*A Sensational New Short Novel*

by **RICHARD DEMING**

*When they asked her to testify against her own boss, she had gone before the jury reluctantly, convinced of his total innocence. She was still resentful, when suddenly she learned just how guilty he was. There was no place for her to turn, and she found herself in danger of her life. The lonely farmhouse was no protection against the killer waiting at the door!*

---

### THE LITTLE GIRL MURDER CASE

*The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel*

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

*When Mike Shayne rescued the child from the hands of the kidnappers, he thought he was through with the unusual case. He hadn't counted on recognizing one of the men, a recognition that led the redheaded detective into a closing net of extortion, violence and murder. There were no clues, but the one offered by the girl herself, a child too scared to talk!*



# THE DEADLY TAXICAB

by  
TALMAGE POWELL

*The man in the back seat moved and suddenly he could feel the cold steel at his neck. "Don't try anything," the man said. Gus shrugged. The next stop for him was Death!*

THE NEEDLING rain had all but stopped, and Gus Coulakis knew the boom of business was tapering off for the night. He cruised north on Gramercy, his taxicab a cozy swathe of warmth against the late-hour chill that had swept in behind the rain.

Traffic had thinned to an occasional swish of tires peeling along otherwise deserted streets that still reflected a black-slick. Then there was movement half a block ahead, a tall, bareheaded figure in a flapping raincoat angling into the cold halo of a street light and wagging a signal.

Gus slowed, craning his stumpy neck. With all the street violence nowadays, Gus sometimes wondered if he hadn't been as safe in that old war, the one in Korea. He studied the raincoated figure as it enlarged in the headlights. Blondish young guy with wind whipping through shorter-than-yippie hair and a well-trimmed beard. Clean-cut. Seemed to be sober. He was carrying a suitcase, which seemed to Gus a good sign.

Gus slid the wheel to the right, braking at the curb. Anyway you cut it, you maybe bought trouble every time you made a payment on the hack. After all, the most angelic looking young fellow he'd ever

taken aboard was the one who'd tried to cut Gus's throat with a dull fisherman's knife.

Ushered by a wash of cold air and a rustling of the raincoat, the passenger plopped in the rear seat. "Union Bus Station, please." He talked straight, not like he was goofballed or geared up.

Gus flipped the meter to life and gave the crate some gas. He lifted a dead cigar stub from the ashtray and clamped it between his teeth. He was a stumpy figure behind the wheel with a pleasantly ugly face of crags and creases beneath his visored cap.

"Nice rain. Sort of washed the air."

"Yeah."

Gus glanced in the rear view mirror. He liked fares who talked, people from places he'd never seen. It was the moving around the city and meeting people that kept Gus punching a hack.

The silence from the back seat ruled out the weather as an opener. In his warm, easy-going, guttural Gus tried his standard number two wedge. "How about those Mets?"

"Yeah."

Okay, the guy wasn't talkative, and Gus respected the other man's rights with a silence of his own.

The heavy shadow of a via-

duct flowed across the misty windshield as Gus turned off Gramercy. He'd have coffee and a cruller in the all-night restaurant at the bus station, he decided. Pick up a final fare among debarking bus passengers. Call it a night and get some sleep.

Tomorrow was Sunday, and Gus liked to feel his best on his day off. After-church he'd take Gerata and the kids to lunch at the Acropolis, which his brother Chris owned, and if the sun came out—

The thought was sucked right out of Gus's head by a round little pressure on the back of his neck.

Gus's short-fingered peasant's hands went stiff on the steering wheel.

"Take it easy," he requested cautiously, "I know a gun barrel when I feel one, and I ain't fool enough to reach for any hardware."

"Then we'll get along, understanding each other." The voice from the rear was cool, conversational.

He's a pro, Gus decided, knows the score, figures the odds, won't go off half-cocked, at least. Gus knew the suitcase was a gimmick, a clever prop. Part of the robber's modus operandi, as Lieutenant Bradshaw of the Robbery Detail called such things, carried along

to lull cab drivers who might have otherwise passed up a fare in the cold glare of a street-light.

"Pull over," the robber suggested.

"Yes, sir."

Gus eased the taxi to curbside. He threw a glance the length of Fielding, the old brick street they had turned onto. All he saw were the shadows of warehouses and garages in the feeble street glow. Not a police cruiser in sight. Not even another car, for that matter.

"You look like too nice a joe for this kind of thing," Gus said.

"Save your breath!"

"I got a wife and three kids. How come you want to do this to my wife and kids?"

"They're your lookout, hackie."

"Then how about yourself? Why do it to yourself? Don't life mean nothing to you? What kind of future you got?"

"Depends on how much bread you're carrying." The young man grated a laugh.

"How about a deal?" Gus asked. "You put down the gun, and I swear it's like you never took it out. I'm a good listener. You got troubles. I got troubles. Maybe we can be some help to each other. I know guys in my church, important guys, who'd try you on a job."

"A nine-to-five? You think I'm some kind of square?"

"I think you're a mixed up kid," Gus said bluntly. "I think you can either be grateful—or very sad—you ever got in this taxicab."

"Look, dummy," the young man said between his teeth, "you're beginning to talk like it's you, not me, that's got the gun."

"I ain't forgetting the gun," Gus assured him. "I'm just telling you, this is a special kind of taxicab."

"Yeah? What does it do? Blow up like a doomsday bomb?"

"Not exactly," Gus admitted. "But it's the world right now. Your world and mine. Just the two of us, squared off in the darkness. Ain't it time folks quit squaring off and mistreating each other? Use your head for something besides a hairpiece, pal. You take all I got, it ain't much. It's gone a day or two from now. But that other, that memory of the nasty thing you've done and that image of yourself all nastied up from the memory, it ain't gone. You got it for the rest of your life. Why not remember something a little better?"

"Look, man, you're being robbed! You know that? You some kind of nut?"

"I've been robbed before."

Gus sighed. "I'm still around. I guess I'll be robbed again."

"You try to con everybody who sticks a gun in your back?"

Gus stole a glance around with a careful turning of his head. "It ain't a con, son. You think it's just a con to save my bread? Then you already got a lot nastier image of yourself and the world your brain sees than you ought to have."

"You want your teeth smashed in?" the young man asked.

"Deliver me from the thought!"

"Then get out. Empty the pockets. I'll take the cab. You can walk back to Gramercy and hitch a ride."

"Son. I've made a lot of payments on this hack. You think I'll turn it over to you just like that?"

"You got no choice whatever, goofball."

"That's all you've got to say?"

"All," the young man said.

"Okay," Gus said. "But I have to be sure. I've talked one or two of them out of it. I couldn't give you anything but the same break."

"Man," the robber said on a hissing, exhaled breath, "you're the one going to need a break if you don't shut your face."

Gus's left foot made an unseen movement. The metallic snapping sound of a released



spring came from the rear seat. The young robber's body lifted a few inches. His face contorted with sudden pain. His yowl could have been heard half a block away.

Gus had thrown himself down on his side, out of the line of reactive pistol firing.

"Hold it, son!" his muffled voice filled the cab. "Don't shoot or you're dead! You've been hit with a poisoned dart. Without me you're dead!"

Gus raised slowly. The robber

had shifted in the rear seat. He was clawing at his left buttock, staring at Gus in shock and consternation.

"The gun ain't no use now," Gus said. "You see, you've been injected in a sensitive place with cannaballis aerobus. Deadly drug. You got about one hour to live, unless I get you to the antidote. So toss that useless little popgun on the front seat."

The young man stared, undecided.

Gus grinned. "It's your life, pal. Your minutes. Don't feel hard at me. Instead, get sore at them that came along ahead of you and lifted my bread."

Gus tipped back his visored cap. "Third time I got robbed was the charm, like in the old saying. I figured I better do something or quit driving a hack. But I like driving a hack. It's mine, see? I worked for it, paid for it. And I didn't like the idea of some punks taking my work and my style of life away from me. So I took the back seat out and spent a full day rigging it. It's got five metal tubes sticking straight up from the bottom. They're placed so you can't sit nowhere back there without your backside being a target. Each tube has got a stout spring which I can trigger with a touch of my toe. On each spring rests a dart

made from an icepick coated with that drug I mentioned. Fellow rides peaceable, he don't never know about that back seat. Fellow like you, he does."

The young man swallowed thickly. He lifted his left hand and stared at the brown-gummed dart he had pulled from his nether flesh.

"Stings, don't it?" Gus said placidly. "That ain't nothing. Just wait until your toes and fingers start to tingle. Then the needles of pain, waving all over you. Too late then for the antidote to do you any good."

"Okay," the young man gasped. "Just get me to a doctor."

"Doctor?"

"The antidote, you freak out!" the young man practically screamed.

"Oh, that," Gus said. "Sure. Hand over the gun."

One hour and thirty minutes later, Gus and Lieutenant Bradshaw, a college trained cop who looked like a stevedore, came out of Bradshaw's office and crossed toward the main desk in the precinct station-house.

Instead of coffee at the bus station, Gus had shared a thermos with Bradshaw after the robber was booked.

"Gus," Bradshaw gave his head a wry shake, "I don't know about you. I just don't

know. Maybe we ought to lift your license."

"On what grounds?"

"Or swear you in as an official member of the police force."

"Not me," Gus said. "You guys go around with your lives in your hands. Anyhow, I'd make a lousy cop. I'm a hackie, Lieutenant. Even Gerata is resigned to that fact of life."

They bellied up to the main desk. The lean young desk sergeant lifted a sandy brow.

"This is getting to be a habit," he said. He lifted the

petty cash box and set it on the desk top.

"That's right," Bradshaw agreed. "Gus has brought in four of them in the past two months. I guess those darts really sting, driven in at least an inch and smeared with that concoction of molasses, salt, iodine, and raw alcohol."

"What's the tab, Gus?" The desk sergeant opened Petty Cash.

"From a point on Fielding to the stationhouse, the meter says a buck-eighty," Gus said. "But don't forget the tip."



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# “A DIFFERENT STORY”

FREQUENTLY, we receive manuscripts which, though excellent in every respect, do not fit the editorial requirements of the magazine. Usually, such stories, even when exceptionally entertaining, are rejected—with sincere regrets.

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE strives to present its readers with the very best in mystery reading, from classic to contemporary works, within the framework of its editorial policy.

Usually, the decision to accept a story is an easy one to make. Being a mystery magazine, we can safely reject science fiction tales, stories of

the merely gruesome, westerns, romances, the obscure and the entirely *outré*.

Yet...

From time to time, we get a story which seemingly meets our qualifications, a tale so well told as to be exciting and perfect in every way for publication—in every way but one. It does not fit into the usual mystery, detective, crime format of the magazine.

Because of this, such stories are returned to the author by the publisher, unfortunately never to be seen by the public. After long contemplation, it is now our feeling that this need not be, that such stories, while



not entirely within our format requirements, still should entertain our readers, and deserve to be presented to the public, to be read.

These stories are too unique to be categorized. They fall under many headings: detective, suspense, mystery, thrillers, the humorous, the grotesque, the supernatural and even witchcraft. They range from novel length to short story length.

Yet they all share one thing in common. They are so totally different as to be treasures in the field of fiction. We believe we would be depriving our readers if we did not make a determined effort to publish these stories and give them special attention—headline them, as it were.

We have decided to call these stories by the only name which will fit them all, without exception—"different".

With this first story in what we trust will be a long list of distinguished but non-format stories, we are establishing a precedent. But, by presenting such stories, and, in a sense, departing from our former editorial policy and format, the change is not so drastic as it may seem at first sound. We continue to bring you the very best in mystery reading in  
**MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY**

**MAGAZINE:** we have, however, concluded that the "best" is sometimes a "different" story.

Therefore, when Mr. Runyon's story arrived in our offices, it was read with excitement—here indeed was the very story with which to start this new series.

Though it is a story of the supernatural, it is at the same time an excellent detective story, filled with suspense and mystery. It is a story which, once begun, is hard to put down. It will lead the reader inexorably from the world of the normal, to the world of the very eerie, the strange, the dark.

The thematic development is simple—and yet with what power and force it grips the reader! With what sureness and deftness it lifts the reader out of the everyday world and sets him down in a world of terror and fear!

Tight, well paced, and exceedingly chilling, as deviled as *The Exorcist*, and yet in no way an imitation, but an original and frightening gem of the mystery genre in its own right, "The Dead Survive" will make you shudder with fear as no other story can do.

**LEO MARGULIES**  
Publisher

# THE DEAD SURVIVE

by CHARLES W. RUNYON

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*The reader should be warned: "The Dead Survive", the first in our new series, A "DIFFERENT" STORY, is more than a detective tale: in it a young lawyer calls on the services of a strange society and works with their female representative to solve a startling mystery. It is a tale to make your spine tingle, for it is a tale of exorcism and vampirism, a dread tale brought into vivid reality by the extraordinary talents of its author; a truly "different" story!*

---

I KNEW she wasn't a Gubb's Knob product. Straight ash-blond hair combed back from her forehead, long graceful fingers curving around her coffee cup. The pale arch of her eyebrows told me her color was real and not something brewed up in Sadi's Beauty Saloon.

She sat with her spine straight, legs crossed under the table, powder blue skirt hitting her about eight inches above the knee. She smoked and gazed through the plate-glass window beside the booth, though there wasn't much to see except a half-dozen cars parked on the asphalt strip outside the motel. Diesel rigs blared past on the two-lane highway, interspersed by an oc-

casional farm truck with an aluminum camper shell mounted on the back. On the river bottom beyond the road, rows of dry broken cornstalks converged to the point of infinity.

Gubb's knob is *country*.

I walked into the steamy warmth, through the brewed coffee smell. Standing beside her booth I asked: "Are you Ann Valery?"

She raised her eyes—a dark clouded blue, like some northern ocean. She wore no wedding ring, only a blue sapphire of about four carats surrounded by seven white diamonds. Her nose was thin, narrow, patriotic.

"Who are you?"



"Fred Bagram. I called your society—"

"About a man who returned from the dead, right?"

Her voice was calm and conversational, but her words

seemed to echo through the place like a Chinese gong. I glanced quickly around: a truckdriver was shoving pie into his face, a salesman scribbled in his order book, Goldie

was throwing cups under the counter.

I slid into the seat and leaned across the table. "Tell me, have you ever known of anybody surviving death?"

"An authenticated case? Never."

"But you think it could happen?"

"In the nature of things, all is possible. But this is one of the least possible."

"Why do you say that?"

Ann Valery lit another cigaret, clicking a tiny gold lighter with an enameled coat-of-arms welded on its front. "I'd rather not speculate. Why don't you tell me what you know?"

"First I have to know how much your society charges. Since I'm alone in this—"

"The society is merely an information center supported by people like myself. Some charge for services. I don't."

"That's good. I mean, that you give your time."

"It's good that I don't have to waste it on neurotics looking for attention. You're not one of those, so," Ann shrugged, "speak. I'm listening."

I looked out the window, trying to think of a way to begin. My reflection bounced off the glass—square face, blunt features, curly brown hair with thick eyebrows almost meeting across the bridge of my nose.

My cheeks were clean-shaven and glossy in the pale light.

"His name's Robert George. Real-estate agent, heavy drinker, skirt-chaser, mid-thirties, normal in all respects. He had a trailer parked on some property south of town, he used to go there when he got drunk. His old lady, Eunice, had a habit of throwing dish-water on him when he passed out at home. About a month ago his trailer burned down with him inside it. His hair wasn't even singed."

"How do you know he was inside?"

"I watched it burn."

Her brows went up a fraction of an inch. "How well do you know the... non-deceased?"

"We've been close friends for years. I'm his lawyer. We hunt and fish together when he isn't on the bottle."

"Do you drink?"

"Occasionally. But I wasn't drinking that day."

"Please go on. Tell me what you saw."

"Well, he was on the tail-end of a two week bender, and I drove out to his trailer to see if he was ready to rejoin society. The trailer sits in an open field, near the edge of the national forest. No houses within a couple of miles. I saw black smoke boiling up from a mile away. When I pulled into the drive

the flames were whipping up to the treetops. My hair sizzled before I got within thirty feet of the trailer.

"I wrapped my coat around my head and tried to get closer, but my shirt started smouldering. I had to stand back and watch it burn. The steel frame twisted like burnt matches. The aluminum siding peeled off and I saw Robert George's body lying on the bed. There was heat-warped and smoke but I saw him clearly, believe me."

"What did you do then?"

"I drove to a service station about three miles away and called the sheriff. Then I drove back to the trailer. Robert George was sitting on a rock, staring at the smoking ruins. I couldn't believe it. Robert couldn't remember anything. He didn't even know what day it was. The sheriff came roaring in and saw Robert sitting there and really blew his screw. He figured we were both drunk and putting him on. Said he'd throw us in jail if we pulled anything like that again. Then he left."

"And that was a month ago?"

"Yes. Since then I've gotten very little sleep. Because I saw and yet I know that crazy people are also sure of what they see."

I looked down, twisting the gold masonic ring on my little

finger. I realized that my hands had been in constant motion while I talked, clenching, flexing, gesturing.

Ann reached out and put her cool hand on mine, looked at me with her smokey blue eyes, and said, "You're no more crazy than the rest of us, Fred. Can I see the site of the fire?"

## II

NOTHING remained but a flat slab of blackened concrete, a double axle and wheel rims with the tires burned off, twisted sheets of gray flaking aluminum, a warped metal sink and a tangle of copper tubing.

Ann Valery walked around with her hands in the pockets of her beige carcoat, scraping at the cindery grit with the edge of her brown oxford. She stamped the slab and tilted her head in a listening pose.

"What's the best way to get under this?"

"Dynamite, jack-hammers, picks. . ."

"Any quiet way?"

"I suppose you could sink an offset shaft angling down under it, but it would be tough digging through that hardpan clay. Why do you want to go down in that particular spot?"

"If you've got a small broom I can show you."

I walked back to the car and got my whisk-broom. When I came back Ann was busy pulling aside the tangled remnants of furniture and bed springs in the center of the mess. At her direction, I swept off the ashes and saw an oblong patch of clean concrete about seven feet long and three feet wide.

Ann stood looking down at it, her blackened hands at her sides, a smudge of soot alongside her nose. She was frowning and chewing her lip. After a minute she looked at me.

"It's like a patch of skin that won't take sunburn. Just stays white all summer."

I glanced at the square of blackened bedsprings she'd dragged off the slab. "That's where the bed was. Robert George was lying in it when I saw him."

She knelt down and flicked her gold lighter. The flame flared blue in the sunlight. She sighed, stood up, and dropped the lighter back in her pocket. "No use to dig. The power's not here anymore."

"Maybe Robert carried it with him."

"Yes, or it could be carrying Mr. George. Let's go see him."

We walked back to my car, a Ford sedan, conservative except in color, which is engine red. I pulled some tissues from the dispenser under the dash, and

she cleaned her hands and face while I drove.

The narrow blacktop twisted through low hills covered with scrub oak, hickory and sassafras. We passed an occasional farmhouse, but these were deserted, their windows broken out, the roofs covered with sheet iron and filled with baled hay. Several gray pyramids rose out of the surrounding forest; at their base grew clumps of tarpaper shacks surrounded by rusting hulks of autos.

"What are those heaps of gravel sticking up?"

"Chat dumps. What's left after the ore is separated from the rock."

"What kind of ore?" Ann asked.

"Gold. Silver. It played out years ago. All the miners moved south."

"But not you, obviously. Why did you stay?"

"My dad left me a law practice, so I decided to get some experience before I went out into the world."

"I see." She didn't sound interested, so I didn't say any more. The road wound around the base of a knob-like mountain that rose a thousand feet above the rolling plain. On top of it stood a fire observation tower, like a grand-daddy long-legs standing on tiptoe.



"Gubb's Knob," I said. "Our famous landmark."

Ann glanced up and stifled a yawn. "How has Mr. George's health been since his death?"

She said it deadpan, so I didn't realize how funny it sounded until I'd started answering.

"He's got no appetite. And he feels cold all the time. Eunice, his wife, you recall, left him three weeks ago."

"Oh? Why?"

"She's a hardshell Baptist and whatever she doesn't like is the work of Satan. That included Robert, finally. Eunice went to live with her sister in Florida. I'm processing their divorce. Robert gave her their house, but she didn't want it. He won't live there either."

"Where's he living?"

"At the river cabin. It belongs to a little hunting and fishing club we organized about five years ago."

I turned off the road and stopped at a gate made of steel pipe with chain-link fencing stretched between the bars. I got out of the car and pulled a ring of keys from my topcoat pocket.

Opening the padlock, I slipped out the chain and pushed open the gate. I beckoned Ann Valery to drive the car through. She slid behind the wheel and drove through, then



scooted back over when I closed the gate. I drove down the slope, following a double track of crushed grass. The trail ended in a grove of tall sycamores.

I hurried around to open the door for Ann, but she was already standing beside the car with a faint smile on her lips. Together we walked toward a log cabin which squatted on a rise of ground. It seemed to have grown there, amid fallen,

rotting trunks, hanging vines, and sinuous creepers which snaked along its eaves.

A set of deer antlers had been nailed to a board above the door. Beneath it was lettered: *Gubb's Knob Hunting Drinking and Fishing Society.* **NO WOMEN ALLOWED** —except by appointment. Ann lifted her pale eyebrows, and I coughed and knocked on the door. Somewhere upriver a kingfisher loosed its harsh rattle.

I lifted my hand to knock again. Ann caught my wrist and pointed to the fuse box nailed under the eaves, just beside the stone chimney. The lever had been pulled down, cutting off the juice to the cabin.

"What does that mean?" I whispered.

"Spirits operate in the electro-magnetic field. They don't like electricity. It gives them the astral itch."

This was the first outside support for my theory that Robert George was involved in something supernatural. It should have relieved me, but instead it gave me a cold prickling sensation.

I took hold of the knob, turned it slowly, then pushed open the door. The cabin was uninsulated, unpaneled, with rafters and wall studs extend-

ing into its single room. In one corner stood a refrigerator with its door hanging open. It contained only an olive jar one-quarter full of yellowish juice.

In the center of the room stood a cast-iron heating stove with a greasy black skillet sitting on top of it. Nearby stood a table which held a pack of dirty playing cards, an overflowing ashtray, and several dominoes stacked in the form of a derrick. The room stank of stale smoke, bacon grease, and dirty socks.

Three folded army cots stood in one corner like stacked rifles. A fourth cot sagged under the burden of Robert George, who sprawled on his back with his legs spread out. His nose, which was pointed at the ceiling, gave forth the sound of deep snoring.

As the door clicked shut, he jerked upright, snorting, looking around him with his eyes wide with terror. He saw me and relaxed slightly, then saw Ann and rose to his feet. He stood blinking, looking vague and bewildered.

He was a big man, six feet three and broad-shouldered, but his large frame seemed loosely put together. A dark beard covered his jaws and chin. His eyes were squinty and red-rimmed; they widened as Ann walked toward him.

His nostrils flared, and he turned slightly as if about to run away. Then Ann lifted her hands, palms toward him. George bowed his head and accepted her touch with the docility of a sheep. For a minute the two stood like that, Ann with her eyes closed, her face calm and composed, George staring from me to her, blinking and twitching the muscles around his mouth.

She dropped her hands and said: "You'll be all right, Mr. George."

Then she turned and walked out. George sank onto the cot breathing heavily, wiping his face with the sleeve of his plaid flannel shirt.

"Who's she, Fred?"

"Ann Valery. The psychic research society sent her down to look at you."

"Oh, hell! Just because you thought you saw me in the fire..."

"It didn't hurt you to have her look, did it?"

"Does she know what she's doing?"

"I get the impression she does. But I'm in no position to judge. How about you? How do you feel?"

The big man's shoulders sagged. "I feel like I belong in a grave. Really, Fred, I'm not kidding. I'm stone cold inside. I could eat a whole handful of

Mexican chili peppers and not turn a hair."

"You feel like something's trying to take you over?"

Robert George shook his head, a rapid motion that was more like a shudder. "No I wouldn't care if it did at this point." He looked up, tears swimming in his eyes. "Why me, Fred? I just want a normal life. If Eunice was right, if I really did give my soul to the devil, then where's the payoff? The gold, the girls, the good times. When do I get *that*?"

"That's a good question. Where'd you go last night?"

"Nowhere. I stayed here and played solitaire."

"In the dark?"

"Well—mostly I slept."

"You were sleeping when we came in. What are you doing, giving up?"

He dropped his head, his bony wrists resting on his knees, his big veined hands hanging limp between them. I looked at him a minute, then shoved my hands in my topcoat and walked slowly to the door. Then I turned. "Why'd you cut the fusebox?"

"Oh, it's that refrigerator. Belt's loose or something. Sounds like a chopper taking off. It finally got under my skin."

*You could have pulled the plug. I thought it, but didn't*

say it. "Can I bring you something? Pizza? Cheeseburgers?"

George shook his head without looking up. "I've got no appetite, Fred. Thanks, but I couldn't eat a thing."

I looked at him another minute, trying to think of something to say. "You just hang on, Robert. Ann Valery'll come up with something. Don't give up."

He said nothing, gave no sign of having heard me. I shrugged and walked out, circled the cabin once, then walked back to the car. Ann was sitting on the hood, her legs crossed, her coat open, her cigaret burning between her lips.

She said nothing when I walked up, but slid off onto the ground and climbed into the car. I got in and drove up the lane. I opened the gate, waited for her to drive through, then got behind the wheel and shut off the engine. Then I leaned back, resting my arm on the back of the seat, and looked at her.

"Well?"

She nodded. "Maybe."

"Maybe what?"

"It's hard to explain to someone who's... uh..."

"Stupid?"

She flashed me a quick annoyed frown. "Intelligence has nothing to do with it. I was going to say insensitive, but a better term would be

*unwakened*. All living beings project a vital aura. This reveals the state of the psyche.

"Good psychic health comes through as a sort of electric blue shimmer, not visible to the eye, but evident to those who have opened other channels of perception. Evil, or let's say those carnal desires which bind people to earth, comes through as a red tinge, shading to purple, and finally, when one completely gives up, black."

I wanted to ask what my own color was, but sitting in the closed car and breathing the fragrance of her perfume, noting the way her nylon-clad knee pressed against the shift knob, I had a feeling I would register well into the red. Instead I asked what George had radiated.

"Nothing," Ann said.

I blinked. "Nothing?"

She shook her head. "It was like standing in front of a post. As far as the psyche is concerned, Mr. George is dead."

"Then why did you say he'd be all right?"

"What did you want me to say? 'I see you in there, Monster?'"

"You really think—?" I broke off. Obviously she thought so, or she wouldn't have said it. Ann Valery was clearly that type. I started the car and backed into the road. After

about a mile I asked her if she was ready to have lunch.

"Nice of you to ask, but I think not. I'd like to visit the courthouse, if you don't mind dropping me off."

"No problem," I said quickly, clamping off my disappointment. "My office is right across the street. What are you looking for?"

"Death records."

"Oh? Whose, specifically?"

"Everybody's. I want to find out if there are any others around here like Mr. George."

### III

MID-AFTERNOON. From my office over the bank, I saw Ann Valery standing on the curb with the wind blowing the hair off her face. Behind her loomed the courthouse, a three-story limestone structure of a style best known as WPA-Gothic. It looked squat and vulgar in the center of a mounded lawn spotted with evergreens and ornamental spruces.

Ann stepped off the curb and crossed the street toward me, disappearing under a corrugated iron awning. A minute later I heard her climbing the wooden steps to my floor. I jumped up, ran out through the reception room, and opened the door with my name reversed on the frosted glass.

I escorted her into the inner office, went to a cabinet, and took down a bottle of scotch. I took two water glasses off a shelf and lifted the lid of the ice bucket.

"Water or soda?" I asked her.

"I'll take mine on the rocks."

I tonged two ice cubes into each glass, submerged them in amber liquid, and gave her one. Then I hooked my hip on the desk and looked down at her.

"Find anything significant?"

Ann lifted her glass, sipped, and ran her tongue over her pale lips. "Not yet. But I've got a map of your city cemetery showing the graves of those most recently dead. Know what I need now?"

"I'm almost afraid to ask. A shovel?"

"An auger. One of those with a long shaft and a hollow center. I want to drive a probe into each of those caskets."

I put my fist against my chest to still the sudden lurch of my heart. "I could never get the city council to agree to that."

She nodded, taking another sip. "They never do."

"Is it necessary?"

"Essential."

I let out a sigh. "All right. We'll do it after dark. I'll pick you up at the motel around nine."

She agreed and left. I spent

the rest of the day trying to make discreet inquiries, but I didn't find the kind of auger she asked for. Maybe I was too discreet.

And I wasn't too clear about her needs.

I think she referred to some special tool which grave-robbers used, or some instrument for taking core samples on archeological expeditions. What I got was a line-locating bar from my friend the city engineer. It's a long steel shaft with a crossbar on top, and they use it for locating buried sewer lines and cables.

I showed it to Ann when we met at nine. She asked me if I could sharpen it. It took time, but I used my bench-grinder to put a sharp point on it and along about midnight, we drove out to the cemetery.

I felt a bit queasy sinking that steel shaft into that mound of dirt, but Ann was standing there with her pencil flashlight checking the names on her pad against the names on the stones just as if she were judging petunias at a flower show. I kept pushing until I felt the point thunk against the top of a casket, then I took a ball-peen hammer and hit it a hard lick right at the crossing of the "T".

It popped through the metal and sank into a soft pillowy re-

sistance that made my stomach grow up like a clenched fist. I pulled it up and Ann flashed her light on the tip. I didn't have to look because the stench of decay hit me in the nostrils.

"A ripe old cheese. Who is it?" I asked.

"Hubert Viertel," Ann said. "Born 1890. Died September twelve. Three weeks ago."

"I thought embalming was supposed to keep them pickled for years."

"You know how it is. Everybody skimps on materials. Why should undertakers be different? Let's try another one."

I wiped the point of the bar on the grass and followed her. I was wearing striped coveralls of the type used by service station attendants; she wore a dark brown jumpsuit with orange laces binding it to her wrists and ankles.

I can tell you now there's no harder place to walk at night than a graveyard; it's an obstacle course of slabs, pillars and crypts, with the ground humping up where you least expect it.

The cemetery covered about twenty acres of rolling ground; it's almost bigger than the town, since the living population has dropped to about twenty per cent of what it was when the mines were running. I guess Ann's map was accurate

enough, but one slab looks like another in the dark, and she had to get right up against the stones to read the inscriptions.

By the time we'd checked seven graves, I'd begun to feel guilty about puncturing the mortal remains of former friends and neighbors. The minute I sank the probe in number eight I knew we had something different. The soil was loose, and the bar slid in almost without effort. The point struck the casket with a hollow thunk, and I had just about the same empty feeling in my chest.

Ann lifted the hammer and swung it in the awkward way most women have, with her elbow held out and forward, and I admit I shut my eyes and turned my head, wondering if I could still practice law with mutilated hands. But she hit the "T" square on, and I felt the bar make its brief empty plunge through space and then hit the bottom of the casket.

"Empty." I forced the word through my tight dry throat.

She nodded, then opened her pad and made a notation beside the name. "Vera Yount. Did you know her?"

"Too well. She was a barfly. Honky-tonk queen grown old in the trade. Her liver gave out finally."

Ann closed the pad and



walked on. I pulled out the probe and followed her.

Dawn was flaring up in the east when I probed the fifteenth grave; it was unoccupied, just as numbers eight, twelve and thirteen had been.

The last six graves were on a hillside sloping down toward a wooded creek. My feet were dragging by this time, and I was sort of trailing the bar behind me, but then we went over the top of the ridge and a warm moist breeze hit me in the face.

I stood for a minute looking down the slope, at the ground fog swirling around those gray silent stones, and for a second it all seemed unreal—Fred

Bagram, respectable attorney, out all night puncturing cadavers with a woman who looked like she'd have been at home on a millionaire's yacht. Then I saw Ann standing beside what looked like a fresh yellow mound of clay.

"This girl was buried day before yesterday," she said when I got there. "Look at that."

I saw a large shoe-print mashed into the damp yellow clay. I put my foot inside it and saw that it extended at least two inches in front of my shoe.

I looked at her. "According to standard police procedure, we should make a plaster cast of this print and match it against the shoes of our suspect."

"Good idea," she said. "Who's our suspect?"

"Just off-hand, I'd say Robert George, judging from the size of the shoes. We used to call him Gunboat George. He could squeeze his foot into a twelve double E, but it pinched him."

Ann walked around for a minute, examining the ground and kicking the dirt, sniffing the air and looking in all directions. Then she bent down and picked up the hammer.

"Let's make sure it's empty, shall we?"

It was. So was another of the graves on that slope. Out of twenty-one graves we'd examined, six had been empty.

My mind kept spinning around that fact. The deaths had been spaced out over a period of at least two months; so, apparently, had the grave-robbing.

I back-tracked and found footprints on at least four, but they'd been almost obliterated by the heavy rains we'd had at the end of September. Each of the prints were of those super-sized clodhoppers which I suspected belonged to Robert George.

The sun was edging up like a tangerine slice, and cars were beginning to roll past on the highway. Both of us were too tired to talk much; I dropped Ann off at the Inn, and she said she was going to take a hot shower and then eat. I said I guessed I'd do the same, and would meet her for breakfast before we went out to visit George again. I really felt like driving off toward the sunset with Ann Valery at my side, but she didn't seem frightened and I certainly wasn't about to show the white feather in her presence.

#### IV

IT SEEMED strange, as we sat down to breakfast, to think that only twenty-four hours had passed since I'd first met Ann Valery. I didn't feel quite the squarish lump that I'd felt



the first time, though she'd changed very little, except to put on a tweed pants-suit in a dark brown herringbone pattern.

I got a whiff of her perfume and that was another oddity, to sit across from a beautiful woman after digging in graves all night, with an assortment of deliverymen, businessmen, and traveling salesmen sitting around us and none of them *knowing*.

Ann didn't speak until she'd hacked her way through a stack of leathery hotcakes. Then she lit one of her long French cigarets, took a swallow of coffee, and pulled the notepad out of her purse. She slid it across to me, open.

"These are the people whose graves were empty. See if they have anything in common."

Her list was written in a slashing diagonal script, and she'd drawn a round "O" before the name of each person who no longer occupied his grave.

"Let's see. Zach Harbin went down a couple of times for hog-stealing. Ten years the last time. He got taken off in a knife-fight about six weeks ago. Vera Yount, I told you about her.

"Burt Reisner. . . I don't know his record. He was a traveling man, came home after a six-month absence, opened the door

of his apartment, and got a bullet in the head from his wife's boy-friend. Ira Hastings. No trouble with the law, but his hardware business went bankrupt. Lots of bad loans. He was trying out one of the guns in his store and it went off, so they say. Most people assumed he committed suicide.

"Bill Means was a local bad-boy who played with drugs too long and got hooked on smack. He dealt in small quantities, just enough to support his habit. They found him dead with the needle stuck behind his eyeball. I guess he'd run out of veins. Carla Frick? That's the grave where we found the footprint. She's a juvenile. I think she died of convulsions, but I don't know anything else about her."

"How do you know about the others?" Ann asked.

"I was prosecuting attorney for a couple of years. It's a common practice to put new lawyers to work for the county. Idea being that they'll be hard, energetic prosecutors, eager to show their mettle. The fact is that they're intimidated, brow-beaten, teased and laughed at by older lawyers. You wind up feeling like an enemy of society. I suppose it's good training, but I'm not sure it's good law."

Ann flashed a smile.

"You seem to have retained some idealism."

I felt embarrassed by her steady gaze, and looked down, muttering to change the subject: "As far as having anything in common, I guess you could say that these six, with the exception of the girl, who was a ward of the county, were not what we call respectable elements of society. At least here in Gubb's Knob, they weren't highly regarded."

"As a result of what?"

"Well, personal habits. Drinking, dope..."

"So if they started behaving strangely nobody would be surprised?"

"They wouldn't even notice."

"And you said Mr. George had a heavy drinking habit, didn't you? He used to go out to his trailer and drink himself into a stupor?"

"Yes."

"And the little girl, why was she a ward of the county?"

"I think she was feeble-minded or something. Her parents couldn't take care of her."

"Could she have been epileptic?"

"She could have been. What are you getting at?"

Ann's forehead wrinkled as she looked down, tipping the ashes off her cigaret into the ashtray. Sunlight came through the window and made her hair

glow like spun silver. I couldn't help wondering what had turned her onto a study of the other world, when she was obviously so well-equipped to excel in this one.

She laced her fingers under her chin and said: "Spirits prefer a *tabla rasa*, a body in which the ego is very weak. Alcoholic blackouts, drug freak-outs, attacks of *gran mal*, all these tend to blow out the ego and leave the body temporarily unoccupied. A roving spirit wanders along, finds one and says, 'Ah-ha, a vacant house.' So he slips in and takes up residence. When the ego reawakens, it may not be able to kick the spirit out."

"What happens then?"

"Sometimes they share the same body, with control saw-sawing back and forth until the original possessor goes insane or gives up and dies. Sometimes the occupying spirit is lazy and doesn't try to dominate. It just rides along, looking over your shoulder. Some are even benevolent, and try to help their hosts."

"Would you say Robert's is benevolent?"

She shrugged. "It protected him from the fire, apparently."

"That could be enlightened self-interest. If he'd burned up, the invader would have had to find a new body, wouldn't it?"

"Yes." Ann frowned and stabbed out her cigaret. "Whatever it is, it's been very active." She closed her pad and slid out of the booth. "Let's go and see Mr. George again, shall we?"

## V

WE DROVE OUT and I parked in the lane outside the gate. It was her suggestion; Ann wanted to approach without warning. That alone was enough to raise the hair on my neck.

All the way down the hill I kept getting hot and cold flashes. I was so nervous that if a twig had snapped I'd have done a backward somersault and come down running the other way.

Even the cabin looked foreboding. Wild grapevines trailed down from tall sycamores like webs of a giant spider. The scent of damp decay filled my nostrils like glue. Once I'd loved the smell of rotting wood; now it spelled only death.

Ann stopped suddenly and pointed at the doorstep. Somebody had scraped a slab of yellow clay off his shoe.

"Do you have that kind of dirt around here?" she whispered.

"No, it's all river bottom, gumbo and sandy loam."

"So where did that come from?"

"The graveyard?"

She nodded. "Open the door."

I reached out and turned the knob, then flung the door wide. The body on the cot was a faceless ruin. Judging from the double-barreled shotgun which lay between his legs, Robert George had tucked the muzzle under his chin and pulled both triggers. The blast not only removed his face but the front half of his skull.

But that was not the ultimate horror. Inside the flannel shirt and stained khaki pants lay a body well advanced in decay. The hand dangling at the side of the cot was held together only by a few cords of dried sinew.

Ann stood, her nostrils flaring, then she choked, gasped and, putting her handkerchief to her mouth, ran outside. I walked out a moment later, saw her with one arm braced against a tree, vomiting. I sat down heavily on a cracked wooden bench which had once been a church pew. Ann stumbled over wiping her eyes, collapsed beside me and lit a cigaret. Her voice was flat and unemotional, as if the horror was too much to be conveyed in verbal terms.

"That was Mr. George?"

"Near as I could tell. That's

the shirt he had on yesterday."

"How far along would you say the decay process was?"

"It takes animals a couple of months to get into that condition at this time of year."

She let her head drop onto her fist, supporting her forehead. "I never ran into anything like this before."

She looked suddenly shrunk-en, defenseless, and I realized with some surprise that she must still be in her early twenties. She drew on the cigaret as if smoke were her only link with life. I sensed a subtle shift in our relationship.

Before, she'd been the leader, and I the faithful, stupid servant. Now at least we were at an equal level of ignorance. For some reason it made me feel stronger. There's nothing quite so enervating as carrying out complicated instructions when you don't know the reason for them.

I stood up. "The law's clear on one point. Find a body and you must report it to the proper authority. In this case, the county sheriff. Let's go get him."

Ann stood up. "You go ahead. I'll stay here and look around."

"Now listen—I'm not leaving you alone. Not after what happened to Robert."

"You think you know what happened to him?"

"Well, he shot himself, for one thing."

"I don't intend to shoot myself, dear."

The word brought a sudden splash of warmth in my chest. I stammered, then backed up and started over.

"No, but if you get caught by the thing that had him, if it's still here—"

"It's gone. Otherwise I'd feel it."

"You didn't feel it yesterday when you stood right next to George."

"Oh, stop being chauvinistic. Go get the sheriff. I'll stay within shouting distance."

I watched Ann walk toward the river, hands shoved in the pockets of her belted beige car-coat, her blue headscarf hanging out like a tail. She paused at the river bank and then stepped over the edge, clutching a birch sapling to keep from sliding.

I resisted the urge to follow her, turned and trotted up to the car. Rather than drive all the way back to town, I drove three miles to the intersection and phoned the sheriff from a service station. I told him Robert George had apparently been fooling with his shotgun and shot himself dead. The sheriff sighed and said he'd be right out with the meat wagon, and there'd better be a corpse

this time or I could consider myself under arrest.

I drove back to the place and opened the gate for him, let him drive through with the ambulance behind him, then closed the gate and followed in my car. The sheriff was a squat, heavy man with bristly gray hair, coarse features, and small squinted gray eyes. He wore matching gabardine shirt and pants separated by a wide leather belt to which was buckled a .45 automatic.

When I drove up he was walking toward the cabin with that king-swagger a country boy gets when he hangs a gun on his hip. But when he opened the door all his bravado leaked out of him. He hunched over and shot me a scared look from the corner of his eyes, then backed off and stepped outside the door.

His face was white.

He looked like he wanted to barf like Ann had done, but instead he motioned the ambulance driver and his assistant inside and told them they'd need the plastic bag. I could see he was shook but didn't want to show it; he pulled out his pad and unclipped his ballpoint and slid his eyes over to me, like he wasn't sure just who or what I was.

"You sure that was Robert George?"



"Pretty sure. He was wearing those clothes yesterday."

"Yesterday, huh? *Then how come he looks like he's been dead a couple of months?*"

The sheriff looked like he was about to flap his arms and take wing. I couldn't do anything but shrug, and he shoved the pad to me and told me to fill the damn thing out myself. Then he got in his car and started tuning his police radio, as if the county were seething with crime and unrest which required his personal attention.

I filled in Robert George's vital statistics and where it

said time of death I put the magic word: *Unknown*. Human nature was funny that way; people could be faced with the entire riddle of existence and the minute you put a label on it, they were satisfied.

By then the ambulance boys were coming out with their burden in the black plastic bag; it seemed to hang light between them, and I decided there was probably nothing left of Bob George but skin and bones. I gave the sheriff his pad and he looked at it with eyes like boiled eggs, then stuck it in his pocket and muttered that he hoped this was the last he saw of that S.O.B. I guess he had some premonition that it wouldn't be, because after he started his car he leaned his head out the window and said:

"Fred, you got any more little surprises, hold 'em til after I retire, okay?"

He shook his head and rolled up the window, muttering to himself, then spun up about a half-acre of grass getting his car turned and headed back up the slope. I couldn't help wondering what he'd do if I told him there were six corpses at large in his fair county.

## VI

I FOUND ANN sitting on a drift log with her hands folded in her lap, watching the river

suck and swirl around a submerged snag. When I sat down beside her she sighed and lit a cigaret.

"I've worked out a theory," she said.

"I'd love to hear it."

"This creature has learned to reactivate the dead. Somehow it managed to solve the basic problem, which is getting the initial energy boost to keep the body going until it can make up for the lack of blood. Maybe it does it with breathing. You can force oxygen into your cells by a yoga routine known as *bhastrika*. Once the corpse is risen, the first thing it must do is find fresh blood. Otherwise it merely dies again."

I felt a prickly rising at the back of my neck. "You're talking about vampirism."

Ann paused.

"Yes, that's the popular term. I've never had a chance to investigate the phenomenon, nor do I know anyone else who has. Old records indicate that it used to be widespread, but we've since improved our burial procedures: A specified number of clamps on the coffin, a certain amount of earth above it. Reason for this in ancient times, being..."

"To keep the vampires from getting out?" I broke in.

"Well obviously. What other reason could there be?"

"And the embalming fluid?"

"Prevents revival by denying blood to the new spirit. In times of disaster, or on the battlefield when corpses lie unburied for days, we get reports of vampires. But these are impossible to check immediately, and when our investigators get there the vampire has usually managed to blend with the rest of the populace. They still practice their art, but they learn to cover their crimes by mutilation or fire, so they're never actually caught."

I opened my mouth a couple of times, but was unable to marshal any arguments against her. I'd always suspected that the undertaking profession was based on superstitious fear; it made sense only when one accepted her theory.

I bent over, dipped my hand into the water, and bathed my forehead. I was beginning to feel feverish. "How do you account for Robert getting caught by this thing?"

"I don't really know. I suspect that he died or was killed out in the open, where his body was not immediately discovered. The spirit took over, revived him, used him until as long as it could, and then. . ."

"Wait a minute, Ann. If he was occupied, how was he able to live with Eunice as long as he did? And talk to me about

things that only Robert George could have known?"

"I don't know. How is memory stored in the brain? How long does it survive death? Electroencephalographs have picked up brain waves as long as twelve hours after the heart stops beating. I'd guess that the invading spirit would have access to the memories and habit patterns of the original personality."

I frowned, stamping my heel in the thick rubbery mud. "Tell me why Robert shot himself?"

"You mean, why did the creature destroy the body?"

"Okay, put it that way."

"I think it was aware of me yesterday, even though I didn't see it. It decided it was time to shift to a new body. The shotgun was an attempt to cover its tracks. Maybe it didn't know deterioration would be so rapid."

"Shifted? You mean into one of the missing corpses?"

"Of course. This is a non-physical entity. It can't function in this world without a physical body. No more than you could cut steel without a blowtorch."

I stood up, looked at the yellow-brown river and the sycamores and birches arching overhead. Usually there were kingfishers, crows, jaybirds, and ducks and all manner of

hummingbirds gliding and flitting through the tunnel under the trees. Now there was only stillness, and a light warm mist drifting down like smoke. I'd done enough hunting to understand what the quarry feels: a jittery crawly sensation of unseen eyes peering out from cover. And that's exactly how I felt.

"You can't sense the creature?"

"No. Perhaps it's learned to shield its emanations."

"All right then." I put down my hand to help her to her feet. "We'll resort to primitive methods. If it has a body, it also has feet. And feet leave tracks."

We started our spiral search pattern at the door of the cabin. Three hundred yards out we found a dead doe lying in a fence-row overgrown with sassafras and prickly ash. My first thought was that hunters had nailed it out of season and flung it into the brush; we got a lot of city people who come down and shoot everything that moves. Then I saw that its throat had been torn open.

"Couldn't have been dogs," I said. "They'd have ripped her belly open."

Ann looked at me in surprise. "Can't you smell it?"

I drew a deep breath, then I caught it—a sharp, rank sick-

ening stench that didn't stop at my nose but went straight to my guts, congealing me with cold fear.

"What is it?"

"Scent of the beast. It keeps scavengers away from the body in case it wants to use it."

She was kneeling beside the deer, peeling back its fur to study the gaping raw slash in its throat. It had been drained of blood, though there was none on the ground beneath it.

"How did you know that?" I asked.

She raised her head and looked at me. "What, Fred?"

"About the creature marking its kill. You said you'd never studied vampires."

Ann blinked. "I don't know. I just knew."

"Is it possible you could pick up emanations without being aware of them?"

"Well yes...but if we start thinking like that we won't be able to trust our own senses, will we?"

I already felt myself sinking into mental quicksand. I was glad when she finished her inspection and we resumed our search for tracks. It didn't feel good to stand in one place for more than a few seconds.

We found the first print in the pasture about twenty yards from the dead doe. Water had run down into the hollow and



then evaporated, leaving a pan of soft fine sediment. In it was the imprint of a bare foot no more than seven inches long.

"How old was Carla Frick?" she asked.

"Around twelve, I think."

"So this would be about right. Now we know what we're looking for."

## VII

THE PRINT gave me a bearing, and I started walking across the meadow toward a high limestone bluff overlooking the river. I found another print in the middle of an old cow pile. That reminded me that I'd often seen Roy Grant's herefords grazing here on the rye grass.

They were gone now, and that led me to remember reports of calves slaughtered and left lying in fields. This coincided with the beef shortage, so people just assumed that rustlers had gotten scared off before they finished butchering. Now it seemed clear that it had been a vampire seeking blood, and I asked Ann Valery why the creature chose animals instead of humans.

Her answer was cold.

"No reason at all, except convenience."

"So if it activates another corpse, and there are no ani-

mals available, it may kill humans?"

"You're learning," she said.

I found two more prints before our way was intersected by a creek. We followed it into a dense thicket of wild blackberries. The hooked barbs caught our clothes and kept forcing us to back up and free ourselves. We were both scratched and bleeding when we reached the pool where the water bubbled out from beneath the cliff.

"It went underground here," Ann said.

"Apparently," I said. "But I don't see how."

"Easy. It doesn't have to breathe."

I walked around the pool looking for tracks but found none. When I returned, Ann had taken off her coat and spread it on the spongy turf. She sat down, pulled her feet into her lap, and rested her hands on her thighs, palms up.

"I'm afraid I'll have to show my ignorance again," I said. "Why are you sitting like that?"

"It's a stable posture. I withdraw my mind from the physical world in order to pick up emanations on the energy level."

"You said it was probably shielded."

"Apparently, when other people are around. Right now

I'm hoping it thinks its safe and doesn't have to be on guard."

I waited. Again, I noticed the dead silence, the lack of birdlife which I'd come to associate with the beast. The sun hung in the overcast sky like an anemic egg yolk.

After about five minutes Ann began speaking, not like somebody in a trance, but as though she were getting her thoughts out where she could look at them.

"When all is well, the energy flows in a perfect circle. Each level has its own unity. When there is a break between portals, the circle is pulled off-center, like a tilted carousel. It's tilted now in that direction."

Ann pointed with her eyes closed. I followed her finger and looked up at the towering cliff.

"Could you follow it?" I asked.

"If I concerned myself with walking, then I'd be drawn down to the physical level. I'd lose it."

"Suppose we climb to the top of the cliff, and I'll carry you piggy-back."

I was only half-serious, but she liked the idea. Unfortunately we lost ten minutes finding the switch-back path leading up, and spent more time slipping, sliding and dragging

ourselves up to the top. We found ourselves in a rocky glade overgrown with dark fragrant cedars. Ann sat down to take another fix, and I stood waiting, pleasantly anticipating the task ahead of me.

"It's moving away," she breathed after a minute.

"In a straight line?" I asked Ann.

"Lots of turns and cutbacks. But it tends to go in that direction."

She pointed toward the northeast, where the land sloped up to the summit of Gubb's Knob.

"Let's go," I said.

She didn't weigh more than a hundred pounds live-weight, but the going was all uphill and the slope was littered with loose chunks of flint which kept turning under my feet. I had my elbows hooked under her knees with her thighs resting on my hips, and every time I let my mind dwell on what I was carrying, I got weak in the knees. We'd gone maybe a quarter-mile when Ann said in my ear:

"It's gone out of range. You can let me down."

She slid off, leaving my back suddenly cool. I threw out my chest and took deep breaths of the cedar-fragrant air. Ann shook down her slacks and started walking uphill.

"Hey!" I yelled, surprised.

She called over her shoulder: "If I walk in a straight line I can probably intersect its path."

I ran up and caught hold of her arm. "What if you intersect it on the surface?"

"It's only a twelve year old girl—"

"It ripped the throat out of a deer. Tell me how it did that."

"Sneaked up—"

"You don't sneak up on a white-tail. They can hear falling dandruff at fifty yards."

"Well, there's some hypnosis involved."

"Right. And you're hypnotized. You know that? You're like a hound dog after a rabbit. They'll run through a barbed wire fence once they're on the scent. And you might run into a trap."

I convinced Ann finally that it was better to take a line of sight, then drive along roads which intersected the line. Then she could get out and find out if the creature was behind or in front.

Ann congratulated me on my ingenuity, which I'd always thought of as a lazy man's way of thinking.

We made a couple of east-west passes through the country. Each time Ann got out of the car and assumed her cross-legged position, the lotus-



posture, she called it, the course-of-energy was a little bit north. The third time I stopped she got out and sniffed the air, turned right and then left, then climbed through the fence and walked through down into a hollow which was covered by wheat-stubble. She sat down in the middle of the field and went into her trance.

Since it usually took about five minutes for her to get a fix, I prowled along the fence

row to see if I could flush some quail. There wasn't even a titmouse in the brush, and that gave me a warning. I looked down into the hollow and saw Ann down on the ground. It looked like she was wrestling with something.

I vaulted the fence and ran down, and she was clawing at the dirt and making sobbing sounds deep in her throat. I hollered at her, What is it? but she just kept digging and making this horrible sound: *Uh-uh-uh-uh...*

It finally struck me that Ann was out of her mind. I grabbed her shoulders and tried to pull her up, but she turned on me like a cat and scratched my face. Her face was distorted, her eyes wide, and her pupils dilated. I fended her off with my hand, but she kept coming, backing me up until I felt that barbed-wire stabbing into my back.

I got her wrists trapped in my hands but Ann wrapped her legs around me and threw herself backwards. I put out my hands to keep from falling on her, and she clamped my neck in a strangle-hold, with her right hand gripping her left wrist.

A dark film came over my eyes. Her teeth raked my neck. I remembered the deer with its throat torn out and realized

this was no time for half-measures. I chopped my hands down on her neck but she tightened her tendons so I couldn't hit the nerves. I gritted my teeth and wrapped my hands around her-throat and squeezed, feeling her wind-pipe moving under my thumbs.

Ann stared at me with her eyes bulging, then she collapsed. I caught her in my arms and carried her across the fence. When I reached the car, I sat in the seat and held her across my lap, with her head against my shoulder. I felt a bitter rage at myself for lacking the skill to knock her out painlessly, the way it shows in the karate books.

Still, she didn't look damaged. With the madness no longer twisting her face, she looked angelic, her eyes closed as if in sleep, her lips slightly open. I bent down and felt her warm breath against my face. An inch more, and my lips touched hers. I tasted the salty tang of my blood on her lips.

When I quickly lifted my head she was looking at me, her eyes tranquil but vaguely puzzled.

"How'd we get into this situation?"

I felt a hot flush of embarrassment, but Ann didn't try to pull away, so I kept my arms around her while I told her

what had happened. Male-female chemistry began to take effect, and a warmth grew where our flesh came into contact. She must have felt it too because she sat up in the seat and said:

"I'm still cold. . . *inside*."

"I've got a thermos of coffee in back."

"Just what I need."

While Ann sipped the hot brew, I examined my throat in the mirror. One pink spot showed where her canine tooth had broken the flesh. I touched it and felt a sick-sweet thrill run through my body.

"Now I know how a vampire victim feels," I said.

She shuddered, holding her cup in both hands. "You're taking it well. How do you know I'm not still possessed?"

"Oh, wow! If you could have seen yourself—! Don't you remember anything?"

"I remember. . . hate. There was something evil beneath me. I wanted to dig down and get it, destroy it."

I took her hand and saw that two nails had broken off. Blood oozed from the quick. I opened the glove compartment and took out a vial of merthiolate.

"Why'd you attack me?"

"I thought you were going to do something to me. Something terrible. Oh!"

Ann jerked as I daubed the

merthiolate on her fingertips. I held her hand and blew softly. "You know what I think? You tried so hard to find a vampire you turned into one—just for a minute. Hunters do that. To find a rabbit you have to think like a rabbit."

"Maybe." Ann looked out the window and frowned. "What do you suppose is under that spot?"

"It used to be a sinkhole, but old Charley Grant kept throwing in bed-springs, old mattresses and dead cows until it got plugged up."

"I see. And what's beneath the plug?"

"An underground river. We can get a good view from the knob."

I drove up Gubb's Knob, and we climbed the firetower. I showed Ann the blotches of richer vegetation forming a sinuous line across the valley.

"There's only a thin limestone mantle covering the granite. Used to be full of gold and silver, but that's gone now. This knob we're on is what's left of a volcanic plug that spewed out when the granite formed. The reason we've got an underground river is that water sinks through the porous limestone, hits the hard granite, and can't go any deeper. So it cuts a channel through the limestone."

"Sometimes the roof caves in, and the surface of the ground sags like wet ceiling plaster. That's your sinkhole. I didn't remember it until now, but Robert got drunk and fell into one about two months ago. He was lucky to get out alive."

"Which one?"

I traced a line with my finger, starting at the cliff near the river cabin to the valley below Robert George's trailer. "You see that black smear where the trailer burned? And down at the bottom of the hill, a circular grove of tall trees? That's it."

"How do we get down into it?"

"You're not going. You're too susceptible."

"Don't talk rot. I got caught because I let my guard down in order to track the beast. It won't happen again."

I gave in and took Ann back to the motel, where she changed into her jumpsuit. Then I drove to the house of a mountaineering friend and borrowed rope, cleats, pitons, pick, spray paint, flashlights with extra batteries and drinking water.

## VIII

THE SUN was sinking when we walked down the hill past the blackened concrete slab. Inside

the ring of trees the ground sloped down like a gigantic funnel. I tied the rope around a sycamore, and we passed it through our beltrings and rappelled down. The limestone blocks pinched into a circular hole about three feet across.

I played out the rope until it hit bottom, then took hold and slid down until my feet struck rock. I jerked on the rope and after a minute Ann slid down beside me. I held her around the waist until she found footing on the damp rocks. The entry hole was a pale silver coin hanging high above us.

I unclipped my flashlight and played the beam around. We were standing on a pile of rocks washed clean by the inflow of water. A domed chamber had been gouged out of the soft rock, and a black stream trickled around the foot of the mound.

"That way," I said, pointing downstream.

We followed the flashlight beam into a narrow tunnel. Rats perched at eye-level along niches in the wall, and I could hear them scurry and chitter behind us after we passed. After about twenty yards the roof dipped down and forced us into a crouching duck-walk. Then it lowered still more, and we had to drop to our hands and knees.

After what seemed twenty minutes, we came to a narrow crevice which could admit only one person at a time. I squeezed in first, shining the light on the ground. The stench was a forewarning. There was nothing I wanted to do less than go on, but Ann was behind me, so I dragged myself forward on my elbows. After a minute I froze and let out a yelp.

"What did you see?" Ann's muffled voice sounded behind me.

"A foot."

"Alive?"

"Dead. Long dead."

I pulled myself forward and stood upright in the fetid chamber. The foot belonged to a male corpse in a rumpled, mud-stained business suit. Patches of white hair clung to his dry wrinkled scalp. I moved the light and saw four other bodies sitting up in their burial finery, their jaws gaping wide.

"Recognize any of them?" asked Ann, standing beside me.

"Of course." There was Vera. Death had continued the process of decay I had seen in her face the last time I'd been forced to take her into court. Her baby-blue burial dress was twisted askew on her body, her arms twisted impossibly behind her back. A cast-off doll. And Burt Reisner with the bullet

hole in his forehead leaking a powdery brown stain down into his right eye socket.

I played my light across the grisly rank, holding my hand over my nose. The others, I supposed, had died much earlier; in any case they were too far gone in decay for recognition.

My hand jerked as the light struck a figure hidden behind the others. "My God, what's that?"

"A baby," Ann breathed.

"You mean it *was* a baby."

Now it was a monstrosity. A huge leathery abdomen swelled out; it must have been at least a yard in circumference. Patches of fuzz grew on a wrinkled gray-white scalp. Grime encrusted a toothless slit-mouth. Its legs were thin as pipe-cleaners, with joints swollen like grasshopper legs. Obviously it had never used them for support; they were set too wide on the pelvic cradle.

A sheet of callous on its belly revealed its method of locomotion. Long nails curved like sabers. It seemed to look at me with its large dark eyes, but the sockets were empty. It was like all the others in this devil's displayroom. Dead.

"That could be the original," said Ann. "A baby fell in, couldn't get out. It grew in here, living off lizards, rats, in-

ects. Then Robert George fell in and the creature shifted to George, took him over, and then..."

I interrupted. "Ann, I don't think we ought to stand here theorizing. The body of Carla Frick is missing. That's the one that's inhabited."

"Yes, you're right. But where—?"

I felt an icy chill on my back. I whirled and aimed the flashlight, and the light went out.

I reached back and grabbed Ann's hand, pulling her down with me to the floor of the cavern. I lay holding her tight, breathing her hair which lay across my face, curving my body around her in a protective fetal posture. You never know real darkness until you're underground. It doesn't stop at the eyeball, but presses in upon your brain until you can't think for panic.

I whispered in her ear: "Did your light go out too?" It was a dumb question.

"Yes. Try a match."

I had to stretch out my leg to get my hand into my pocket. The match flared, enclosing us in a capsule of flickering light. I reached back into my pack and fumbled for the spare batteries. Fire nipped my fingers and I dropped the spent match. I found Ann's hand and pushed the match folder into it.

"Light another match while I change batteries."

Haste and nervousness combined, so that I dropped one of the cylinders into the dirt. I finally got the batteries in and the cap screwed on, then I fixed Ann's light. When both flashlights were working, I took my snub-nosed automatic out of the pack and attached the clip-holster to my belt.

"I don't think that's a good idea, Fred."

"Why not?"

"The body is only a carrier. The nature of the beast is non-material. If you destroy its present body, *you* will provide the new one."

"I think that's superstition."

"Believe me. That's how it works."

Reluctantly, I shoved the pistol back in the pack. I dropped to my stomach and wormed my way through the narrow tunnel, scraping my shoulders against the rock. I had the distinct impression that the rocks were swelling in around me like a gigantic esophagus. Clammy sweat greased my body. I snorted often, trying to blow the stink of death out of my nostrils, but it was lodged somewhere up behind my eyeballs.

From forty feet away I could see our rope trembling.

I started crawling, stumbling



and falling up the slick wet rubble. I caught the rope and pulled, feeling a soft springy resistance. I shifted my grip and swung my weight from it. Resistance ceased, dropping me to the stones. I pulled on the rope, sick with fear that it might have been cut, but it held firm. I pulled myself up hand over hand, levered myself up through the hole, and called down to Ann.

"Hook the rope to your belt and I'll pull you up."

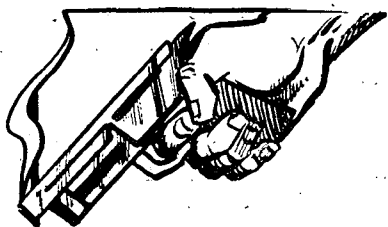
The constellations were spread out like diamonds when we walked out from under the trees. A breeze rustled the sedge-grass. Our shoulders touched, and it suddenly struck me how warm she was, how precious and fleeting was life, and how ridiculous the ponderous conventions of courtship. I slid my arm around her waist and we walked up the hill.

The hood of my car gaped open like the jaws of an alligator. A quick inspection showed me the clamps had been pulled off the distributor cap. The rotor was missing.

I shivered.

"This scares me, you know. Worse than those corpses."

"Yes," said Ann. "It seems to retain the memories of those it inhabits. Carla Frick would never have known enough to do this. Would Mr. George?"



"Yes. He was mechanically clever."

"So the creature is getting his bearings here. Learning the way of this world. It'll be more effective now. More efficient. I wish I knew what it wanted."

"What do you *think* it wants?"

"There's no way to tell. It would have an alien set of values and referents. It couldn't have desires like you and I, because there can be no material rewards, no time-things on the astral plane of existence. It—"

Ann broke off suddenly and stared across the road. I held my breath as ten seconds went by. Then I heard the deep frantic barking of a dog, ending in a gurgling yelp which raised the hair on my scalp. A man yelled. Four rifle shots punched neat spiral holes in the silence.

## IX

ALL THIS HAPPENED in less than thirty seconds, but Ann Valery was already across the road

and climbing through the fence on the other side. Curse her impetuous soul. I ran after her, ripped my pants jumping the wire, and caught up with her at the edge of the woods.

There was no need to go further. A dead coon-hound lay with his lips peeled back in a snarl, its throat ripped open, blood matting his fur. About ten yards away, lying under a prickly scrub-oak, lay the body of a young girl.

"Carla Frick," said Ann, matter-of-factly.

It seemed a reasonable assumption, though the black swollen face revealed no clue to what the girl had looked like when she was alive. A frilly white party dress was twisted around her bloated midriff; her legs were only partly clothed in flesh. Four bullet holes punctured the front of her chest. I could have covered them all very easily with my outspread hand.

"Good shooting," I murmured.

"So much the worse for whoever did it."

"What? Oh, I see. You think that now the hunter..."

"Isn't it reasonable? Picture the scene. Carla Frick, call it that for convenience, comes out of the hole. Exertion of the body burns fuel which must be replenished. Dead organs can-

not digest food and manufacture blood, therefore the raw substance is needed. She scents the dog, attacks.

"The hunter watches in horror, seeing what looks like a young girl gnawing at the throat of his dog. He yells a warning. The girl walks toward him, he perceives that she is... something else. He shoots. The figure keeps coming. He empties the chamber and stands paralyzed by fear. I don't know the details of the occupation, but I rather suspect that the hunter is now the creature we're looking for."

While Ann talked, I'd been playing the flashlight on the ground. I couldn't find the rifle. That gave me an urge to get the hell out. A spook was bad enough, but a spook with a rifle was something else.

It must have been morbid fascination which drew me back to an inspection of the girl. The bloated face, the frozen snarl of lips that once drew sweetly on lollypops, would fuel my nightmares for years to come—but what caught my eye was a black object clenched in her fist. I reached down and pried the rotor cap out of her fingers. Part of her flesh came away with it. As I wiped the cap on the dead grass, Ann was saying:

"Now the creature knows. He

has taken one more step. Always before he relied on those already dead. Now he has learned to create his own corpses."

The dog wore a leather collar. I twisted it around and angled the light so I could read the stamping on the metal tag: BOB WESTLAKE, RT 3 GUBBS KNOB. There was a phone number.

I straightened up and saw Ann walking off into the woods. I called her once, but she kept on with her eyes straight ahead. I ran after her and caught her arm. "Where the hell do you think you're going?"

She turned and stared, not at me, but through me. Her eyes were glassy and unfocussed.

I wasted no time talking. I took her hand and led Ann back to the car. She stood without moving while I replaced the rotor and clamped on the distributor cap. I opened the car door and lifted her into the seat. Her body felt light and waxy, without strength.

Not until I started the engine did she blink and look around. I pulled a half-pint of Early Times out of the glove compartment, uncapped it, and shoved it under her nose.

"Drink!"

"What—?" Ann stared at me, then seized the bottle and tipped it up. I heard three distinct

glurks, then she lowered the bottle and gave a long, moist sigh.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. . . I just happened to slip into its wave-length."

"What's it doing?"

"Moving fast, across country. It's hungry. It seems to know where it's going."

"Which direction?"

"That way." Her finger pointed to the glow of Gubb's Knob.

I burned rubber backing out of the drive and heading north. I passed a camper-truck parked at the entrance to a field. I hit the brakes and jumped out, leaving the engine running. The registration on the truck's steering shaft showed that it belonged to Bob Westlake.

"Why didn't it use Westlake's truck?" I asked as I got back in the car.

"I told you, spirits don't like electricity, not even the small amount generated by a car's ignition system. It makes them nervous, upsets their perceptions."

"Are you nervous?"

She put her hand over mine. It felt reassuringly warm. "I'm all right now. What are you going to do?"

"I know where Westlake lives. I'll stop by his house and pick up his wife, then go on from there."

Westlake was a junker. Behind his six-foot board fence stretched a five-acre sargasso of derelict autos, trucks, busses, vans, motorcycles, and boats. Usually the place was lit by a dusk-to-dawn light blazing atop a thirty-foot pole. Now only the rising half-moon glowed dully on thousands of domed roofs.

The windows of his ranch-style house were dark when I drove up. I switched off the engine and said: "Tell me if he's in there."

Ann closed her eyes. After a minute her breathing slowed to a hoarse, deep rhythm.

"Well?"

Ann jumped, and her eyes flew open. "I don't pick up anything, Fred. But you know, that doesn't mean. . ."

"I know. I'll have to go in. You stay here with the engine running."

"Oh Fred! You wouldn't know what to do if you ran into it."

"Well, tell me."

"The best thing is not to be afraid."

"What's the next best thing? I'm already terrified."

"No, really. It works by paralyzing your will, through fear. The bird and the snake. You hate what you fear, and your hatred consumes you. Thus you become what you hate. Is that clear?"

"No, but I'm going in any-

way. Lean on the horn if you see anything. Don't leave the car!"

I opened the screen door and walked across the wooden porch. The kitchen door hung open; I stuck my head into the dark room and breathed the smell of stale food and dish-water. My flashlight beam found the fuse-box in the hallway. The insert which held the cartridge fuses had been pulled out and dropped onto the floor. I picked it up and shoved the prongs back into their slots.

The fluorescent kitchen light blinked, flickered, and settled into a dull hum. Naked white light bathed a woman's body sprawled across the bedroom door. She wore a blue nightgown and what looked like a wet red bandanna around her neck. Her throat was a ragged gash from jaw to collarbone.

I heard Ann gasp beside me. She ran forward and slipped her hand into the woman's armpit.

"Still warm." She jumped up. "I can track him—"

"No!"

Ann looked at me in surprise. "No?"

"No. We'll go back to the motel and call the sheriff."

Her chin jutted. "Suppose I follow him anyway?"

"I'll stop you."

Ann tilted her head and

squinted at me, looking more puzzled than angry. "I'm not used to being told what to do."

"Sorry about that. I'll keep you safe if I have to cripple you in the process."

I found a sheet and covered the body of Rose Marie Westlake. I didn't like to think about the manner of her death. Probably she'd gotten up to fix her husband a snack, knowing he'd be hungry after his coon-hunting.

I turned out the lights and we drove back toward town. Ann rode in silence. She didn't seem to be brooding, just thinking.

I called the sheriff from her room. The night deputy said Sheriff Hoffer was investigating a disturbance at Chuck and Patty's Tavern, and he would try to patch me into his car phone. While I waited, Ann peeled off her coveralls and opened her suitcase to take out a sheer nightdress. I guess she was so completely attuned to the spiritual plane that she didn't realize how her body affected a carnal person like myself.

The sheriff answered in a gruff, angry voice. I gave my name and then Ann leaned over and whispered in my ear:

"Tell him not to shoot. Whatever he does, don't shoot."

The sheriff growled: "God-

dammit, Fred, say your piece and get off the line. A guy and his gal got murdered in a parked car out here and I got no time—"

"How were they killed?" I asked, afraid I knew.

"Shot, through the windshield. Then the bastard crawled in and cut their throats."

My scalp drew tight. "Nobody heard the shots?"

"No. The damn lights went out inside, everybody was hollerin' and grabbin'—"

"Sheriff, the man who did it is Bob Westlake."

"Are you out of your mind? I've known Bob since the sixth grade. He's harmless as a kitten."

"He's changed. He just killed his wife."

There were three ticks of silence. Then the sheriff said in a tight silky burr: "Fred, boy, where are you callin' from?"

"Never mind that. You go on out to Bob's and look. But if you see him, don't shoot. Just get a lot of men and surround him, take his gun away but don't hurt him. Hear, sheriff? It's important. It's not a joke! Sheriff—"

The receiver clicked in my ear. I hung up and looked at Ann. She was stretched out on the bed with her arms at her sides, palms up. Without taking

her eyes off the ceiling she said:

"You can't keep a sheriff from using his gun, any more than you can keep a bull from using his horns."

I swung a chair over beside her and sat down. "What are you doing?"

She reached out and took my hand. "Stay with me. I'm going to try to communicate."

"I think it's too dangerous."

"No. Lock the door and windows. It can't hurt us physically if it can't get to us. There's just one thing. Whatever I do, whatever I say, *don't let me leave the room*. Remember that. Don't let me out!"

"I won't," I promised.

### X

ANN BEGAN breathing evenly. I took the burning cigaret from her fingers and lay it in the ashtray. Her breath slowed, deepened. I got up and opened the window at the end of the room, looking across the open field which stretched out behind the motel. Dark forested hills reared up a quarter-mile away. Near the crest, where the highway curved, I saw the blue-red splash of neon which marked Chuck and Patty's tavern. The beast had been very close.

I closed the window and yanked down the inside lever, wedging it tightly into its socket. Then I went into the bathroom and fastened the hook on the window. I turned the key in the door and fastened the night-chain. Then I turned out the light and walked back to the bed. Ann was murmuring softly:

"I know how it feels. Hates everybody, everything. Motorcars, buildings, people. I remember the old legends of trolls and little people of Ireland who lived under the ground. I've seen their fairy castles and the magic circles where they dance in the moonlight. This isn't one of those. This is something strange, twisted—OH!"

Ann shrieked and went rigid. I tried to smooth her body with my hands but she was vibrating like a taut doorspring. I found a bottle of scotch in her suitcase, poured a glass full, and let it trickle through her clenched teeth. She snorted and spat, then sat up flailing her arms, knocking the glass out of my hand. I backed away, and she bounced off the bed like an uncoiling spring, crossed the room in two leaps, and started clawing at the door latch.

I ran over and grabbed her arms, pulling them up behind her back. She snarled and

kicked backward, her soft heel striking my kneecap. I imprisoned both her wrists in my left hand and clamped my right forearm under her chin. She twisted her head, her teeth flashing white in the dim light.

I saw her eyes; the pupils were almost out of sight under her lids. I lifted my knee and shoved it against her rump, pushing her pelvis against the wall while I pulled her head back. She writhed, jerked, clacked tracks of fire on the backs of my hands—and then collapsed.

I carried her back to the bed and stretched her out, sliding a pillow under her head. Then I refilled the whisky glass and pushed it under her nose. Ann raised up, took a huge swallow, then lowered her head to the pillow.

"Again?" she asked.

"Yes. How do you feel?"

Ann stretched out her hands and pressed the covers beside her, then reached up and put her hands beside my ears, touching my neck, my shoulders, my body.

"It hates me. I'm the enemy. It feels that I'm persecuting it. It wants to kill me, but it knows it can't."

I held the glass to her lips and she took another sip. "Why can't it?"

"Because I don't hate it."

"You *don't*?" My voice rose in surprise.

"No. It couldn't have been more than three years old when it fell in that hole. God knows how long the parents looked for it, or how many years ago it happened. I get the impression of decades, but it knew neither day or night, just unending gloom. Maybe the child's hips were broken, so that it couldn't walk, and had to crawl around on the floor of the cave.

"It ate frogs, snakes, lizards... who knows what it ate? But imagine what it would be to grow up in total darkness. You wouldn't have any sense of your body. You wouldn't be aware of your mouth, eyes, lips, teeth. You could be a sludge, a pool, a gas, a thought. Unable to walk or see or talk, you would develop your non-physical powers to a fantastic degree. Can I have another drink, love?"

I filled the glass and put it in her hand. Ann drained it in three swallows and gave it back.

"Helps me wall off part of myself," she mumbled. "People do that. They put a brick wall over what they don't want to see, and it just gets bigger and bigger. I'm gonna take a li'l nap, sweetheart. Don't go 'way."

Ann's eyes closed, and her

head flopped to one side. Her lower lip hung open, and I heard the soft snore of alcohol-induced slumber. I hoped it would give her a few hours' rest. I don't know what the night's events had done to her nerves, but mine were jumping like cats in a gunny-sack.

I turned on the dresser lamp and sat in an armchair, programmed to jump and hold her down if the light so much as flickered. After awhile she started muttering, and I went over and put my ear to her lips.

"I live in a hole. I see lights at the top of the world. Animals come, fall in. I eat. Learn. Man comes. He sucks on bubble-shape, drinks blood. I do not know this blood. It makes him fall. His mind breaks into little pieces. I gather up the pieces and make him get up, walk around. It is good. I like the feel of earth moving under my feet.

"I cannot return to my old body. No matter. That body does not walk. Legs too small. It has no eyes to see, no teeth to eat live flesh. Only what is long dead. You think of me evil. Not evil. Buzzard not evil when eat dead cow. Being is. I am. I find forms that others make. Now I know to break minds into little pieces. I pinch out each little I am and put myself there. I eat more now. I

grow strong. I will grow stronger. . ."

"What do you want?" I whispered.

"... Life. Life. I was cheated. I want. . . to live. I want to play in the sun and drop the handkerchief. I know of these things. I have the thoughts which come in to me, I know of cars and radios and flat people who dance on funny glass. . ."

The light went out. I heard screams and the shriek of breaking glass from the bar at the front of the motel. I heard the pounding of feet down the hall, and I threw myself on top of Ann and held her down on the bed. The door thundered, something hard was striking it, perhaps a rifle butt. I stayed where I was, watching the door, holding my breath, waiting for the shots which would shatter the lock.

They didn't come. The footsteps moved down the hall. I heard the rear door open and wheeze shut. A few minutes later the lights came on.

I rolled off Ann. She sat up, brushed her hair out of her eyes, and stared at me. "It was out there," she said.

"Where is it now?"

"It walked off into the woods. I could go talk to it."

"You're crazy," I told her.

"No, listen. Life is a unity. There is no evil outside the



mind. This creature has never known anything but darkness. It doesn't know about the higher worlds. It thinks this is all there is. If I could find it, tell it how to break out. . ."

"It would kill you first."

"I don't think so. I think I could conquer its will. Anyway, what are the alternatives? Somebody will kill Westlake. Then that person will be possessed until he in turn is killed. It would just go on and on. Isn't that a terrible thing to think of? My way is the only way, believe me. Risk one life to save many. Isn't that a beautiful principle?"

"I don't object to the principle. But it's *your* life, it's not a matter of principle."

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Not a damn thing," I told her. "At least until it gets daylight. We're staying right in this room."

Ann gave a long sigh. "All right. Pour me another drink. The vibes in this joint are a shrieking jangle."

Soberly she held out her glass and didn't pull it away until I'd poured it full. I screwed the cap on the bottle and watched her down half the glass and then blink back tears.

"You're not a regular juicer, are you?"

Ann shook her head. "Only when I work. Or rather, when I'm trying to rest." She raised her glass and looked through the amber. "I sensitize myself in order to work. When I try to relax, I pick up emanations from everyone—waitresses, bartenders, people on the street. There's a lot of hate in the world, Fred. This helps to blanket the impressions."

"Does it bother you to be around me? Don't I emanate anything?"

"Yes. Love. It's very restful. Healing."

I looked down, feeling the blood rush to my neck. The bite on my throat burned like the sting of a fire-ant. To change the subject I asked: "What do you do when you're not spook-hunting?"

"I have a little house on a cliff in the Canaries. No electricity, no appliances. Just me and the sea."

"You're like those spooks you're chasing."

"There's not much difference really. They've lost their physical bodies, but I still have mine. Otherwise we're the same. You are too, you know. Trouble is most people live completely on the physical plane. They choke off their astral body, it grows twisted, warped. . . sometimes insane. Like the one we're looking for

now. Ugh. Look, just talking about it, I get goose-bumps."

I slid my hands over Ann's forearms. They felt like coarse sandpaper. Sparks of body electricity crackled between us.

I poured her another drink and moved to a chair. She lay on the bed and we talked. Instinct told me that her will to live needed to be reinforced, so I asked about her past.

## XI

ANN hadn't had what you'd call a family life. Mother and father divorced early, mother descended from some wealthy clan. She'd spent her life in gilt-edged institutions, girl's schools and summer camps where one sought to learn the impractical: horsemanship, music, drama, the arts. . .

She rejected all, had no interest in boys, did not marry. Her income of twenty thousand a year came without effort, from rents on property she'd never seen, interest on bonds she had never purchased.

She didn't think of herself as parasitic; the certainties of life were food, clothing, warmth and the respect of tradesmen and workers. She had no concept of class; being a member of the wolf family, she could never understand the rabbit's fear of wolves.

I didn't bother to propagandize

her. She rejected life on this earth as meaningless because she was not involved in the struggle for food and shelter. I was willing to admit that *she* had been excused from the moiling toil in order to pursue higher things, but what about others who had to suppress their spiritual talents in order to scratch in the dungheap?

Ann said, "Show me one and I'll help him."

So I told her about my practice, how I tried to balance out my term as prosecutor by defending drunks, long-hairs, unwed mothers and other social outcasts.

She said this was my task, she thought that if I'd been meant to work on the spiritual plane then I'd have been born with a free conscience.

Maybe she was right. Anyway that's how we passed the time until daylight. I felt like I'd been dragged through a rose bush when we finally left the room for coffee and breakfast. As we passed the bar, I saw the door hanging on one hinge, with plywood nailed up where the glass had been.

I asked the girl behind the switchboard what had happened, and as she turned I saw the spreading green-purple stain of a fresh shiner. She explained that there'd been a fight. "The lights went out and

everybody lost it. Who threw the first bottle? Who the hell knows? Next it was chairs, and somebody heaved a table over the bar. When the lights came on everybody just stood around gawping at each other."

Ann and I walked down the corridor to the restaurant. Without discussion, we took the same table we'd occupied that first morning. Only two days ago? I could hardly believe it.

The waitress looked sullen as she set our water in front of us and pulled out her order pad. I asked about her husband, whom I had gotten to know during my term as prosecutor. Goldie said she'd thrown the drunken S.O.B. out last night along with bag and baggage and didn't care whether she ever saw him again or not.

She went back to the kitchen and after a terrific clatter of pots and pans she came out with four slabs of burnt toast and said the cook had quit, and did I want to wait on the eggs or go to a decent restaurant? I said we'd wait, and then I looked at Ann and asked:

"You think there's any connection?"

"Maybe. But you'd have to catalogue every husband-wife quarrel in the county before you got a directional fix."

I got up and went down the hall to the telephone booth. I

stepped inside and called my successor in the prosecutor's office. When I asked him what was happening, he wanted to know if I wanted the bad stuff, or the horrible stuff. Then he said never mind, it was all horrible. Apart from numerous beatings, muggings, fights and inexplicable power failures, there appeared to be a mad killer loose in the country.

First, the double murder outside Chuck and Patty's. Then a supermarket cashier had found a customer lying dead between the aisles, without a mark on her except that her throat had been cut. Neighbors helping put out a fire in a retirement village claimed to have seen an elderly couple lying dead in their bed just before the roof fell in. Their throats had been cut. The same with Rose Westlake.

The sheriff had called in all his deputies, got old blind Judge Grable out of bed, and got warrants against the community's known troublemakers. There'd been no word on him since four a.m., when his deputy called in and said he'd just shot Bob Westlake in self defense—

I gasped. "The sheriff shot Westlake?"

"Killed him right in the driveway of Kupp's service station. The deputy said Bob fired

first. They figured he must've gone crackers when he found his wife dead, or else he went nuts first and did it himself. Anyway the sheriff couldn't see any way to take him, so he shot him dead.

"He told his deputy to wait for the coroner, then drove off. Hasn't been seen since. His deputies have already locked up a dozen people and I can't find out what they're charged with. I heard there was even a warrant out for you. If you've got time you might look into it."

"I'll do that, Norman." I hung up and went back to the booth. Ann was digging into a duet of fried eggs, but she pushed her plate back when I told her the sheriff had shot Westlake and disappeared. Her face was as white as the napkin she raised to her lips.

"He's at the jail, of course," she said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because that's where the food is. To the creature who inhabits the sheriff is would seem like a gigantic smorgasbord. When he gets hungry he just reaches in and—oh God! Look out the window!"

I saw a pale blue car pull into a parking slot. The gold shield on its door glamed in the early sun, its red flasher splashed light in all directions. Sheriff Wade Hoffer stepped

out, shut his door, straightened his white stetson, and jerked his wide leather belt up over the paunch that swelled like a bloated dumpling against his shirt. He strode toward the front entrance, his face wearing the dull truculence of a law enforcement officer about to do his painful duty.

I looked at Ann. "Suggestions?"

"Go with him."

"Are you crazy?"

"No, listen. He'll hunt you down and kill you if you don't. You can't fight him with force. He's tied to our world through hate and fear. Only love and courage will drive him away. Do you understand that?"

"No. I can't see laying myself out on the smorgasbord either."

"Don't think about it. Act natural, don't be afraid. Fear will excite him. Once you're inside, start organizing the prisoners for a breakout. You'll hear from me."

I opened my mouth to ask what she planned, but then I heard the sheriff growl at the desk: "Fred Bagram here?"

The girl tinkled with respect: "You'll find him in the restaurant, sheriff."

Ann put her hand on mine. "Don't fight him. Remember: Love, and courage. I'll get you free."

She slid out of the booth and

glided behind the counter. As she disappeared through the swinging doors to the kitchen, I turned and saw Sheriff Hoffer come into the restaurant. Love and courage. Those two things were hard to remember when I saw the sheriff's eyes. They looked like a pair of burnt-out fuses.

I stood up and faced him. "What do you want me for, sheriff?"

He stopped and began shuffling through a bunch of warrants. His thick fingers were stained the rusty color of barn paint—but I knew the sheriff hadn't been painting any old red barns.

He pulled out a sheet and read in a dull monotone: "Fred Bagram. . . murder of Robert George."

"You know I didn't do that!"

"You gonna come peacable or do I hafta handcuff you?"

I knew one thing—I didn't want handcuffs. I walked down the aisle and sidestepped past, him, careful not to touch him, aware that he'd unbuttoned his holster and was resting his hand on his gun.

My back itched all the way to the car. I was happy to sit in back, with wire mesh separating me from the beast, though I admit the lack of door handles gave me worse claustrophobia than I'd had in the cave.

## XII

OUR NEW JAIL stood on the edge of town, not far from the sewage treatment plant. I saw several cars in the lot, but no people. I walked ahead of the sheriff up the short flight of concrete steps and entered the room where prisoners were checked in. Nobody stood behind the counter, nor was anyone at the radio.

I could hear vague murmurs from the lockup area, but these were peevish rather than panicky. As I walked back toward the cells, I glanced into the room where off-duty deputies and lawyers usually sat around chewing fat and drinking coffee. It was empty and dark. I realized the electricity was off.

The sheriff pulled out his keys and unlocked a steel door with a high barred grill in its center. He pushed it open and stepped back, gesturing with the keyring. I stepped through the door. A clamor erupted from the gloom, then subsided to a groan as the door clanked shut.

The trusty who came waddling down the aisle—Dan Kobbe—looked worried and harrassed. He saw me, halted, blinked, and shook his head.

"Fred, I never expected to see you in the slam, considerin'



you're the one put me here. What the hell's got into the Man?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you." I peered into the bullpen—our brochures call it the dayroom—and saw a milling jam of men and boys. There were also a couple of women, which was decidedly against jail policy. I couldn't see well enough to identify anyone. As the trusty inserted his key, the huddled mass crowded against the door:

"I wanta call my lawyer!"  
 "One phone call. I got rights!"  
 "Wife! Gotta call my wife; I just

went out for a pack of cig—"Food! When we gonna eat?"

Kobbe growled out of the side of his mouth: "I'll yank open the door and you jump in quick. Those guys are about to get outa hand."

"Kob, do I look like a fool? I'm not going in there."

"Yay!" "Tell him, prosecutor!" "Sue the bastard!"

Kobbe looked bewildered. He was a product of the prison system, beat-down and confused, tyrannical toward those under him and obsequious toward those above him. Right now he wasn't sure where I fit into the

pecking order. I decided to use his confusion to my advantage.

"Listen, Kob. The sheriff's dropped his marbles. He fell out of his tree, know what I mean? Where's the chief deputy?"

"I dunno."

"Well, where's the radio dispatcher?" I put the whiplash of authority into my voice. "You know the phone's dead? What if the governor calls? What if Mr. Kelly calls?"

"Who's Mister Kelly?"

"Head of the FBI, you idiot!"

"I dunno, Mr. Bagram. I just do what the sheriff says. He comes up and wants a prisoner for interrogation, I let one out. Sheriff takes 'em down to that soundproof room in the basement and interrogates 'em."

"Then what?"

"Let's 'em go I reckon. They don't come back here."

*Let's 'em go, I thought, into the great courtroom up yonder.*

"How many so far?"

"Four."

"Oh God! Listen, Kob. The sheriff's having head trouble. We've seen it coming a long time, but we couldn't move until it came out into the open. This is it. Since there aren't any deputies in the building, you're in charge. Now what are we gonna do?"

Kobbe looked suddenly trapped and frightened. He stared

at the sullen faces inside the bullpen and shook his head. "I dunno." He turned to me. "You tell me. What should we do?"

"First thing is to get that gun away from the sheriff so he doesn't hurt somebody. You go to that grill and holler that there's a prisoner hangin' himself in one of the cells. When he comes in, a bunch will rush down the corridor. We'll have two guys hidden behind the door. You two," I pointed to a pair of husky construction workers who'd probably been hauled in for double parking. "Let 'em out, Kob."

Kobbe unlocked the door without hesitation. The two men stepped out into the hall and stood blinking at me. The other prisoners stood back from the open door, waiting. The place was so quiet I could hear a faucet drip in one of the cells.

"Now," I pointed to the largest of the two men. "You land on the Sheriff's back, and your friend will grab his gun hand. Don't let go, even if you get thrown against the wall. The rest of you wait until I open this door, then rush out and pile on. Smother him. I don't mean kill him, but get him closed in so he can't move. Knock him out if you can, but don't let him use his teeth on you. Kob, you grab his handcuffs and pass them to me. All

ready? Okay, Kob. Go to the door and start yelling."

It was a marvelous plan, and I felt sure it would work. Unfortunately Kob took only one step before the key rattled in the iron door. I heard the sheriff bellow:

"Fred Bagram! Send him out, trusty."

Kob looked at me, waiting. I weighed the chances of a headlong rush and wondered how many .45 slugs would rip through our flesh before we got him down.

At that moment the overhead light flickered, hummed, and blinked on. The loudspeaker made a loud squawk, and Ann's voice blared out into the building:

"Sheriff! I'm speaking to you, Sheriff!"

I heard the scrape of shoes outside. The iron door crept open about an inch. I tiptoed forward as Ann's voice continued:

"... I know you aren't Sheriff Wade Hoffer, but who are you? This is the question you must be asking yourself. The answer is that you are nothing. You were given one body on this earth and what you do with it decides your place in eternity. Are you happy?"

"The longer you claw in this dungheap the less are your chances to attain a state where

there is no hunger, no cold, no loneliness. Your crimes weigh down upon your back like a sackful of rocks. Leave them. Let the flesh fall to the floor. Cast off that cumbersome garment and rise with me into the world of the spirit.

"I will help you. I can show you how. Do you hear me? Don't gorge yourself any further. The more you eat the more the appetite grows, and you will never find satiety on this earth. Leave the body now, give up the flesh, and rise up to where you belong..."

I looked through the grill and saw the sheriff walking away. He planted his feet wide apart and shuffled as if struggling through deep snow. Had Ann's pitch worked? I didn't think so, judging from the snuffling, growling noises which came from Hoffer's throat.

I pushed the door open and stepped through, motioning the others to wait. I had the idea of sneaking up behind the sheriff while he approached Ann, but a sudden outburst of snarling from the front office made me forget caution. I ran into the room and immediately wished I'd picked up some sort of a heavy weapon.

The sheriff was bending Ann backward over the switchboard, and though her neck tendons swelled with effort, the sheriff



doubled her in weight, and she had no chance. I saw his bristly head dip down toward her throat. I leaped on his back, at the same time jerking his gun from the holster and throwing it behind me.

I managed to pull him backwards, and we staggered against the desk. Pain shot out from the base of my spine, numbing me from the waist down. The sheriff heaved his bulky shoulders, and I knew it was only a matter of time before he tossed me over his head. I saw Ann rise from the switchboard with blood oozing from her neck.

"Grab the handcuffs, Ann, in his belt!"

She stumbled forward. I saw her white, rolling eyes and realized she was out of her head and into the killing madness which had seized her twice before. I heard the moaning deep in her throat as she came slowly toward the sheriff, *uh-uh-uh-uh*. . . Her teeth flashed as her head came down like a striking cobra's.

"Agggggghhhh!"

The sound came from the sheriff, and it was the last sound he made in this world. His body jerked and went limp. I pulled the handcuffs from his belt as he slid to the floor. Ann followed him down, her face hidden by her flowing hair. I

heard the steady drumming of the sheriff's heels on the floor and the sickening slurping sound of a vampire feeding on its kill.

Ann hardly noticed when I pulled her hands behind her and fastened the cuffs.

### Epilogue

FIVE YEARS have passed since those tragic events, and the population of Gubb's Knob continues to decrease, though not so rapidly as it did in the months right after our "vampire scare."

I still have my practice. The newspaper folded, so did Sadie's Beauty Saloon—with no noticeable increase in the ugliness of Gubb's Knob women. The bank downstairs is open one day a week, though most folks do their banking in the new city out on the Interstate. People wonder why a young lawyer stays on in a dying community—but they don't usually ask me personally. If they did, I'd just say I liked the fishing.

The problem is that it's hard to move Ann. I've got the grid around her room covered with paneling, so that you can't see the copper wires. I go in and we visit every day. I wear a leather collar which is scarred with her teeth marks, but those

are from the early years, when the alien personality was dominant.

Each time it came out I would electrify the grill inside her walls. I would start my power lathe, my drill, my bench-grinder, power saw and all the other machines. I guess you'd call it pain therapy.

When Ann came back I'd turn them off and tell her who she really was, and how much I loved her. I was always very careful not to call her anything but Ann, even though at times I saw flickers of old Robert George, and even Vera Yount.

The others are all gone now. Usually there is just Ann. We talk about art, and music. I tell her what's happening around town, what I saw on the evening news. She reads the *Wall Street Journal*, and keeps track of her own stocks.

The society called once during the first year—fortunately during a lucid phase, and she told them she was quitting, also to ignore any vampire reports from this community. Apparently they're trusting souls, because they didn't call back.

I have her checks sent here and she signs them. Since I am her lawyer, nobody asks why I conduct her business affairs. Twenty thousand a year buys us a lot of privacy in Gubb's Knob. We still need it, though

not as much as we did at first, when she used to claw the door and shriek like a banshee in her craving for fresh blood.

Then I'd have to chain her to the wall to keep her from biting her own wrists. I used to wonder if it wouldn't be better to inject her with potassium chloride and end her misery, then I'd remember that it would only spread to yours truly, Fred Bagram. In the end I was thrown back on the only weapons she'd given me—*love, and courage.*

It took all I had at first, but now the pressure is off. On pleasant afternoons we take a picnic lunch and drive up to Gubb's Knob. A week ago she fed a gray squirrel from her hand. I asked if she didn't feel just a slight urge to bite into its throat and drink the hot spurting blood. She looked at me with a shocked expression and said:

"Of course not. Don't talk rot." She meant it, too.

That means that the evil spirit had finally gone, and Ann Valery had full possession of her body. Soon a local minister can come and perform a simple marriage ceremony. Not only will I be the happiest man in Gubb's Knob then, but also the most relieved.

Five years is a long time to wear a leather collar.



# WITHOUT MUSIC

---

*She knew every detail of their plan to rob the bank—though she had never met the men, and was too far away to see much...*

---

by  
**CARL  
HENRY  
RATHJEN**

"OPERATOR, get me the police! Hurry!"

"Your number, please."

"888-112... No, sorry, I'm excited, stammering. It's 888-1202. It's Shortley's Music Store. I'm Miss June Patterson and—"

"Police, Sergeant Macauley."

"Officer, the bank at the

corner of Ninth and Orchard is going to be held up."

"How do you know, Ma'am?"

"Because I heard one of the robbers talking about it. In fact he's in a car right outside my store now. I can see him as I'm talking to you. And from what he said there are others somewhere all waiting to—"

"How did you hear him say he was going to rob the bank? Were you out there, or is the front door open so that you could overhear—"

"No, the door is closed, so much dust until there's paving over the new sewer line. And I haven't been out of the store. I can't leave, not while Arnold, he's the manager, is out to lunch..."

"You're calling from the store, Ma'am?"

"Of course. Where else?"

"What store would that be?"

"Shortley's Music Store. I work here. I demonstrate the organs and pianos, give lessons. It's just down the street from—"

"I know where it is, more than a half-block from the bank at the corner. So tell me, Ma'am, if you haven't been out of the store and the door is closed, just how could you have overheard what this alleged bank robber—"

"But I did overhear him!"

"—and you haven't been near the bank, then how do you assume—"

"I'm not assuming anything, Officer. I know. Because I heard him. He was talking into a little box and every word he said—"

"He was using a walkie-talkie?"

"Yes, yes, that's what I

mean. And that's how I overheard—"

"Oh, I getcha, Ma'am. You've got a radio turned on in the store and it picked up—"

"No, I haven't. We don't sell radios. Only organs and pianos... Hello? Sergeant? Hello?... Operator, I was talking to the police and the connection must have been broken. Will you get them for me again? Hurry. Didn't you write down my number when I gave it to you before? Well what became of the other operator? Oh, I see. Whichever operator is available plugs in and... Yes, my number. You do need it, don't you? It's 888-1202."

"Police, Sergeant Macauley."

"Officer, aren't you being remiss in your duty when a bank robbery is being reported and you hang up and—"

"The hell I hung up! Sorry, Ma'am, but it was you who broke off while I got on the horn to dispatch units to—"

"Oh, thank you. Then you do believe me that the bank is—"

"Let's just say, Ma'am, I've got to swallow everything that comes in over this line until proved otherwise. And you'd be surprised at some of the way out-stuff that—"

"Sergeant, I'll have you know that I am not way out. Of course, to please potential customers when I'm demonstrating

an electric organ or piano I have to play some of this way out cacaphony, with all the dissonances that pass for music nowadays. That's what I had to play on the new Lowry a little while ago and then forgot to—"

"What was that word you used, Ma'am? Car-what?"

"Cacaphony."

"That's a good one. I'll have to pull that on my kid with his over-amplified guitar."

"Officer, I heard you correctly, didn't I? You are taking steps to save the bank?"

"I hope it also saves my neck. If I sent units on a phony call, and if it wasn't phony and I didn't—"

"I am not making a spurious telephone call to you. I distinctly heard this man, who is still outside my store, checking that his confederates were where he wanted them to be. Then he told them that something had been grounded so it wouldn't operate at the bank."

"He must have meant the silent alarm system, Ma'am."

"I assume so. I have a nephew who insists on watching all the crime on TV when with a little judicious selection there are many worthwhile—"

"I still can't figure, Ma'am, how you overheard him if—"

"I hope that doesn't mean, Officer, that you were...er, phonying to me when you said

you have ordered other police to—"

"They're on their way, Ma'am."

"I should hope so. The man's getting out of his car. He's walking toward the bank. So I guess the ten minutes must be up."

"What ten minutes?"

"The ten minutes I heard him mention before I called you. He said to them, his confederates on the walkie-talkie, I mean, he said, 'Ten minutes to countdown zero when the sacks will be ready for Brinks.'"

"That would be the shipment to branch banks. Why didn't you say that first, Ma'am? I would have believed you right off, even though I still can't figure how you—"

"I've been trying to tell you. I'd been demonstrating a— There's the Brinks truck going by now. It will stop out front of the bank, double-parking as usual, I suppose. Creating a traffic problem. I know, because I've been caught in it sometimes on the days when I go to lunch early. Arnold, he's the manager, and I alternate on going for early or late lunches and... Hello? Sergeant? Hello?"

"Okay, Ma'am. I was just making sure units were ready and ordered others to create roadblocks just in case. You were explaining to me—"

"Yes, after the demonstration I'd forgotten to—"

"Hang on, Ma'am. Gotta get on the horn again."

"Hello? . . . Hello? . . . Hello? . . ."

"Okay, Ma'am, I'm back. We got 'em! Redhanded! In the act!"

"Oh, good! But I've been wondering, Sergeant. I didn't hear any shots, screaming, sirens."

"Don't believe everything your nephew watches on TV, Ma'am. And now, will you please get my curiosity off the hook about how you were able to tip us off. You were alone in the store. . ."

"Yes, it was Arnold's turn, he's the manager, to go to lunch early and—"

"I know, I know. Just getting my facts straight. One little step at a time. You were alone. You didn't go out of the store, nowhere near the man in the car outside, nowhere near the bank to possibly spot his waiting pals. Yet you got the low-down on their plans to hit the bank in ten minutes—"

"Yes, I'd been giving a demonstration and—"

"Ma'am, please, let's just stick to the question of the attempted bank hold-up."

"But that's what I'm trying to explain to you, Sergeant."

"Okay, okay, do it your way. I'll try to stay with you."



"As I've been telling you, I gave a demonstration of the new Lowry electric organ, and also a Hammond, a Thomas and—"

"Huh-huh! That would be before you overheard about the bank."

"Of course. I couldn't conscientiously do something else if I were aware a crime was about to be committed and I could possibly prevent it."

"Right on, Ma'am. Continue."

"Well, after the customer left. . . I think he was just killing time, wasn't really interested in possibly buying an organ, well, then I came back here to the office and a few minutes later I began overhearing the man in the car out front as he—"

"Hold on, Ma'am. You were way at the back of the store, the door was closed, you had no radio on, yet you claim to have overheard him speaking into the walkie-talkie. Now just how the devil—"

"But I told you, I'd forgotten to turn off the Lowry."

"Huh? The organ?"

"Yes. Maybe you're not familiar with electric organs. But they're all, the newer ones, transistorized, with a main speaker and Leslie, stereo hook-up, tape recording. It's an amazing maze of electronics. I'm just a music teacher and it's all way over my head."

"You got company, Ma'am. Am I right in thinking you're trying to tell me that the electric organ picked up his walkie-talkie?"

"Of course. His voice came out of the speakers right here in the store because I'd forgotten to shut it off. It isn't the first time it's happened when Arnold, he's the manager, or I have forgotten to turn an organ off. Arnold could probably ex-

plain it to you, but I can't. Anyway, we've been startled when, when waves or something are just right, and an electric organ that isn't being played has picked up radio telephone calls from passing cars or trucks. Sometimes we've even heard officers talking in a passing police car."

"Well, I'll be damned, Ma'am. I understand now how you overheard the guy on his walkie-talkie. There'll be officers in soon to complete their report with you. But let me thank you in advance for calling, Ma'am. If there were more citizens like you, there would be sweet music in police ears, though I'll admit that at first I thought your call was a lot of... what was that word again?"

"Cacaphony."

"Yeah. That's a honey. Maybe I'll drag my boy down sometime and you can get him off that stuff."

"I'll be glad to try, Sergeant. It's been a pleasure talking to you. Goodbye."

---

Coming Soon:

## MURDER AMONG WITCHES

a "DIFFERENT" story

by ROBERT J. RANDISI

# The Dog in the Night

*All the houses were alike  
except for one—and soon  
it would be the same, too.*

by  
**EDWARD WELLEN**

CURIOUSLY detached: that was how Stanley Hofer seemed to himself to feel about the thing that had been driving him up the wall.

He lay awake at three a.m. as usual, full of helpless and hopeless rage as usual, staring at the venetian blind shadows striping the walls as usual. But this night he found himself going suddenly calm.

Terribly calm and curiously detached as he listened to the howling dog.

It must have been some invisible and weightless last



straw that did it. Whatever it was, it made him say inside himself, *Enough. It has to stop right now, before I go mad.*



Maybe it was too late. Was he already mad? He did not behave madly. He simply watched himself get up out of bed and with an almost peaceful and absentminded look frozen on his face walk to the dresser and open the bottom drawer.

He had to shake the drawer first to the left and then to the right a couple of times before it came loose, working it out in half inches, but then it came freely, too freely, fell out on the floor. He left it so and took out from under his winter woollies an oilskin-wrapped packet.

The effort had, not shaken him out of his calmness. He carefully unrolled the oilskin and uncovered his revolver.

He made sure that it held a full load of cartridges and that the cylinder spun smoothly. He had kept up his license to own and carry it, though he had retired as a jeweler more than a year back. Now the solid weight of metal gave him additional will and strength and pleasant guilt—Martha had never liked having it in the house.

He stepped into his slippers and put on his robe over his pajamas. It was a night mild enough for pajamas alone but the robe had a pocket stout enough to hold the revolver. Some unconscious center of

cunning was looking out for him; it did not want him to have to stop and answer questions if a cruising patrol car happened by. He went out into the night.

Stanley Hofer lived on Third Avenue and the house he wanted stood directly behind his on Second Avenue. In his free and easy dreamy state he felt he could have floated over the backyard fence. But he did not try to vault the fence. He went out the front door and kept to the sidewalk, along the row of mass-produced tract houses.

The dog's howling faded as he walked away. He looked up at the moon. He smiled. Dogs howled at the moon but man had walked on it. It walked along with him. He turned right at the corner and then right again at the next corner. Second Avenue showed its rows of mass-produced tract houses. The dog's howling grew louder.

Stanley Hofer's hand tightened on the gun in his pocket. Was it a month ago, after long debate with himself, that he had nerved himself to complain to the police that the howling dog belonging to one Lyman Strafuss was disturbing him? The desk sergeant had taken his call but nothing had happened. He had waited and called again, waited and called

again. Still nothing had happened. If anything, during the past week, the howling had seemed worse.

He had asked around and found out why nothing had happened. Even in a group of owners of lookalike homes some have more pull than others. This was a one-company town and Lyman Strafuss was the brother-in-law of a company big shot.

Having reinforced himself with the cumulative past, Stanley Hofer pulled himself back to the climactic present. He had lost count of the houses, but the howling told him which was Lyman Strafuss's. There was no mistaking it, nor any doubting where it came from.

Here, painfully close, was the bark worse than any bite, the howl that ate nerves raw. Heedless of dew soaking his slippers, Stanley Hofer cut across the grass. He stubbed his toe on the lawn sprinkler. That did not bring him out of his dreamy mood of almost merry doom. He bared his teeth in a slow smile.

The stoop had the same number of steps as his own: he felt quite at home. He glued his finger to the bell push.

He listened for the howling to switch to a snarl. But it did not. It kept on unheeding, not changing its maddening tone. It



did grow louder, though, when the door finally opened.

The door opened and produced a fat man with a thin smile. Even the thin smile faded: the face of Stanley Hofer was evidently not that of someone he might have expected to see.

"Yes?"

"No."

Stanley Hofer drew the revolver and fired into the man's chest.

The man saw it coming but could not believe it. It must have seemed to him like something in a dream.

Stanley Hofer had wakened from his own dream. He had come here to kill the dog. His center of cunning had told him

the law did not do much to a man for killing a dog. But the thin smile on the fat face had shown him that he had to kill the dog's owner. Why blame the dog for behaving like a dog? Blame the man for behaving like an uncivilized man.

The man flew back from the doorway, pulling the door wide before the knob slipped from his grip.

Stanley Hofer stepped inside and stood looking down at the body, not really seeing it. He was listening to the howling. Curious. He would have expected the shot and the smell of blood to evoke a frenzy of barking or a cowering silence. But the howling went on its unchanging way.

A woman in a fright wig of curls and a short filmy shift came sleepily downstairs plucking ear plugs from her ears.

"What was that? I told you not to—"

She wakened to the fact that Stanley Hofer was not her husband and quickly folded her arms about herself. Then she saw the gun in Stanley Hofer's hand and followed his gaze to the body. She moaned and fell in a faint at the foot of the stairs.

Stanley Hofer frowned. He stepped past her into the living room. The dog: he had come here to kill the dog and he

would round out the job. What sort of dog was it that hung back and let a stranger come into its master's home and kill its master?

Was it tied up? Was that why it howled? He looked for the shine of the dog's eyes in the dimness but found only the throb of its voice. The wall switch was in the same place as in his own house. He flicked on the light.

He did not hear the patrol car pull up outside. He stood by the whirring reels, still trying to understand, when the policeman walked in.

Stanley Hofer put up as much fight as a clothing dummy when the policeman relieved him of the gun. He was dimly aware of the policeman verifying that the man was dead, and bringing the woman out of her faint, and phoning headquarters and talking to the woman.

Then the policeman was talking to him.

"Who are you? Where do you live?"

Stanley Hofer mumbled his name and, finding his hands cuffed behind him, pointed with his chin in the direction of his house.

"Why did you shoot Mr. Hayward?"

The night turned suddenly cold.

"Hayward? You've got it wrong, officer. I shot Strafuss. Lyman Strafuss."

The policeman shook his head. He spoke as to a child.

"The man you shot is —was— Cal Hayward. Lyman Strafuss is the next-door neighbor." The policeman reached over and switched off the tape player. The tape had run out anyway and the howling had stopped.

"Mrs. Hayward says her husband's been complaining about Strafuss's dog. When he found himself getting nowhere,

he tape-recorded the howling. And for a week now, at three a.m., night after night, he's been playing it back at full volume from a window facing the Strafuss house. Mrs. Hayward says the Strafuss dog doesn't howl when the tape recorder plays. It just listens to the recording of its own howling. But it's been getting to Strafuss. That's why I'm here. Strafuss complained to the police."

And now, with the tape recorder silent, the Strafuss dog resumed its howling.



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**READ—This Great New Detective Novel in:**

**CHARLIE CHAN MYSTERY MAGAZINE**

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## **THE PAWNS OF DEATH**

*A Brand New CHARLIE CHAN Complete Novel*

**by ROBERT HART DAVIS**

*Not even Paris, the City of Light, could dispel the dark hatreds that centered around the contest of intellect in the chess tournament, and for Charlie Chan, the aura of evil that hovered within the shadow of the Eiffel Tower presented a challenge which not even the famed detective dared to resist!*



a  
**HANDGUN**  
for  
**PROTECTION**

by JOHN LUTZ

---

*Once I had loved her, held her  
in my arms. Now there was only  
one tie between us—the tie be-  
tween a killer and his prey . . .*

---

I HAD TO have her. Lani Sundale was her name, and for the past three Saturday nights I'd sat at the corner of the bar in the Lost Beach Lounge and listened to her talk to her friends—another girl, a blonde—and a tall, husky guy with graying hair and bushy

eyebrows. Once there was an older woman with a lot of jewelry who acted like she was the gray haired guy's wife. They'd sit and drink and gab to each other about nothing in particular, and I'd sit working on my bourbon and water, watching her reflection in the back bar mirror.

It wasn't until the second Saturday night, when she got a telephone call, that I learned her name, but even before that I was—well, let's say committed.

Lani was a dark haired, medium-height, liquid motion girl, shapely and a little heavier than was the style, like a woman should be. But with her face she didn't need her body. She really got to me right off: high cheekbones, upturned nose, and slightly parted, pouty little red lips, as if she'd just been slapped. Then she had those big dark eyes that kind of looked deep into a guy and asked questions. And from time to time she'd look up at me in the mirror and smile like it just might mean something.

The fourth Saturday night she came in alone.

I swiveled on my bar stool with practiced casualness to face her booth. "Where's your friends?"

She shrugged and smiled. "Other things to do." Past her,

outside the window, I could see the blank night sky and the huge Pacific rolling darkly on the beach.

"No stars tonight," I said. "You're the shiningest thing around."

"You're trying to tell me it's going to rain," she said, still with the smile. It was a kind of crooked, wicked little smile that looked perfect on her. "I drink whiskey sours."

I ordered her one, myself a bourbon and water, and sat down across from her in the soft vinyl booth. Two guys down the bar looked at me briefly with naked envy.

"Your name's Lani," I told her. She didn't seem surprised that I knew. "I'm Dennis Connors."

The bartender brought our drinks on a tray and Lani raised her glass. "To new acquaintances."

Three drinks later we left together.

It was about four when Lani drove me back to the Lounge parking lot to pick up my car. Hard as it was for me to see much in the dark, I knew we were in an expensive section of coast real estate where a lot of wealthy people had plush beach houses, like the beach house I'd just visited with Lani.

She drove her black convertible fast, not bothering to stop

and put up the top against the sparse, cold raindrops that stung our faces. What I liked most about her then was that she didn't bother with the ashamed act, and when we reached the parking lot and the car had stopped, she leaned over and gave me a kiss with that tilted little grin.

"See you again?" she said as I got out of the car.

"We'll most likely run across one another," I said, with a smile, slamming the heavy door.

I could hear her laughter over the roar and screech of tires as the big convertible backed and turned onto the empty highway. I walked back to my car slowly.

During the next two weeks we were together at the beach house half a dozen times. The place spelled money, all right. Not real big but definitely plush, stone fireplace, deep carpeting, rough-sawn beams, modern kitchen, expensive and comfortable furniture. There was no place the two of us would rather have been, the way it felt with the heavy drapes drawn and a low fire throwing out its twisted, moving shadows. And the way we could hear that wild ocean curl up moaning on the beach, over and over again. It was a night like that, late, when she

started talking about her husband.

"Howard's crippled," she said. "An automobile accident. He'll never get out of his wheelchair." She looked up at me as if she'd just explained something.

"How long ago?" I asked.

"Two years. It was his own fault. Drunk at ninety miles an hour. He can't complain."

"I've been drunk at ninety miles an hour myself."

"Oh, so have I." The shrug and tilted smile. "We all take our chances."

I wondered how much her husband knew about her. How much I knew about her. From time to time I'd marvelled at how skillfully she could cover up the bruises on her face and neck with makeup. She was all that mattered to me now, and it made me ache with a strange compassion for her husband, thinking how it would be watching her from a wheelchair.

"Let's get going," she said, standing and slipping into her suede high heeled shoes. "The fire's getting low."

I yanked her back by the elbow. Then I walked over and put another log on the fire.

Where I lived, at a motel in North Beach, was quite a come-down from the beach house love nest. During the long days

of dwindling heat and afternoon showers I'd lie on my bed, sipping bourbon over ice and thinking about Lani and myself. I'm no kind of fool, and I knew what was happening didn't exactly tally. With her money and looks Lani could have had her choice of big husky young ones, her kind. I never kidded myself; I was over thirty-five, blond hair getting a little thin and once-athletic body now sporting a slight drinker's paunch. Not a bad looking guy, but not the pick of the litter. And my not-so-lucrative occupation of water skiing instructor during the vacation season would hardly have attracted Lani. I already owed her over five hundred dollars she never expected to get back.

Maybe any guy in my situation would have wondered how he'd got so lucky. I didn't know or really care. I only knew I had what I wanted most. And even during the day I could close my eyes and lean back in my bed five miles from sea and hear the tortured surf of the rolling night ocean.

"He has more money than he could burn," Lani said to me one night at the beach house.

"Howard?"

She nodded and ran her fingernails through the hair on my chest.

"You're his wife," I told her. "Half of all he owns is yours and vice versa."

"You're something I own that isn't half his, Dennis. We own each other. I feel more married to you than to Howard."

"Divorce him," I said. "You'd get your half."

She pulled her head away from me for a moment and looked incredulous.

"Are you kidding? The court wouldn't look too kindly on a woman leaving a cripple. And Howard's really ruthless. His lawyers might bring out something from my past."

"Or present."

She tried to bite my arm and I pulled her back by the hair. I knew what she'd been talking toward and I didn't care. I didn't care about anything but her. She was twisting her head all around, laughing, as I slapped her and shoved her away. She was still laughing when she said it.

"Dennis, there's only one—"

I interrupted her. "I'll kill him for you," I said.

We were both serious then. She sat up and we stared at each other. The twin reflections of the fire were tiny star-points of red light in her dark eyes. I reached for her.

The beach house was where we discussed the thing in detail, weighing one plan after



another. We always met there and nowhere else. I'd conceal my old sedan in the shadows behind a jagged stand of rock and walk down through the grass and cool sand to the door off the wooden sun deck. She'd be waiting for me.

"Listen," she said to me one night when the sea wind was howling in gusts around the sturdy house, "why don't we use this on him?" She opened her purse and drew out a small, snub-nosed .32 caliber revolver.

I took it from her and turned it over in my hand. A compact, ugly weapon with an unusual eight shot cylinder, the purity of its flawless white pearl grips made the rest of it seem all the uglier.

"Whose?" I asked.

Lani closed her purse and tossed it onto the sofa from where she sat on an oversized cushion. "Howard gave it to me just after we were married, for protection."

"Then it can be traced to you."

She shook her head impatiently. "He bought it for me in Europe, when he was on a business trip in a communist block country. Brought it back illegally, really. I looked into this thing, Dennis. I know the police can identify the type and make weapon used from the bullet, only this make gun



won't even be known to them. All they'll be able to say for sure is it was a .32 caliber."

I looked at her admiringly and slipped the revolver into my pants pocket. "You do your homework like a good girl. How many people know you own this thing?"

"Quite a few people were there when Howard gave it to me three years ago, but only a few people have seen it since. I doubt if anybody even knows what caliber it is. I know I can pretend I don't."

She was watching me closely as I thoughtfully rubbed the back of my hand across my mouth. "What happens if the

police ask you to produce the gun? Nothing to prevent them from matching it with the murder bullet then."

Lani laughed. "In three years I lost it! Let them search for it if they want. It'll be at the bottom of the ocean where you threw it." She was grinning secretly, her dark hair hanging loose over one ear and the makeup under one eye smudged.

"Why not let me in on your entire plan?" I said. "The whole thing would come off better."

"I didn't mean to take over or anything. I just want it to be safe for you, baby; for both of us. So we can enjoy afterward together."

I wondered then if afterward would be like before.

"I know this gun is safe," Lani went on. "No matter where you got another one, the police might eventually trace it. But with this one they can't."

"Is it registered or anything?"

"No, Howard just gave it to me."

"But the people who saw him give it to you, couldn't they identify it?"

"Not if they never saw it again." She took a sip of the expensive blended whiskey she was drinking from the bottle and looked up smiling at me

with her head tilted back and kind of resting on one shoulder. "I think I've got an idea you'll like," she said. Her lips were parted wide, still glistening wet from the whiskey.

That's how three nights later I found myself dressed only in swimming trunks and deck shoes, seated uncomfortably in the hard, barnacle-clad wooden structure of the underside of the long pier that jutted out into the sea from Howard Sundale's private beach. To the right, beyond the rise of sand, I could see the lights of his sprawling hacienda style house as I kept shifting my weight and feeling the spray from the surf lick at my ankles. I'd always considered myself small time, maybe, not the toughest but smart, and here I was killing for a woman. There'd been plenty of passed up opportunities to kill for money. I knew it wasn't Lani's money at all; I'd have wanted her rich or poor.

I unconsciously glanced at my wrist for the engraved watch I'd been careful not to wear, and I cursed softly as the white foaming breakers surged out their rolling lives beneath me. It had to be ten o'clock!

Lani had guaranteed me that Belson, her husband's chauffeur and handyman, would bring Howard for his nightly stroll

out onto the long pier at ten o'clock.

"Belson always wheels him there," she'd said. "It's habit with them. Only this time I'll call Belson back to the house for a moment and he'll leave Howard there alone—for you."

The idea then was simple and effective. I was to climb up from my hiding place, shoot Howard, strip him of ring, watch and wallet, then swim back along the shoreline to near where my car was hidden and drive for North Beach Bridge, where I'd throw the murder gun into deep water.

At first I'd been for just rolling Howard wheelchair and all into the ocean. But Lani had assured me it was better to make it look like murder and robbery for the very expensive ring he was known to wear. Less chance of a mistake that way, she'd argued, than if we tried to get tricky and outwit the police by faking an accident. And Howard's upper body was exceptionally strong. Even without the use of his legs he'd be able to stay afloat and make his way to shore.

So at last we'd agreed on the revolver.

I looked up from my place in the shadows. Something was passing between me and the house lights. Two forms were moving through the night to-

ward the pier: Howard Sundale hunched in his wheelchair, and Belson, a tall, slender man leaning forward, propelling the chair with straight arms and short but smooth steps.

As they drew nearer I saw that the lower part of Howard's body was covered by a blanket, and Belson, an elderly man with unruly curly hair, was wearing a light windbreaker and a servant's look of polite blankness. They turned onto the pier and passed over me, and I crouched listening to the wheelchair's rubber tires' choppy rhythm over the rough planks.

A minute later I heard Lani's voice, clear, urgent. "Belson! Belson, will you come to the house for a minute? It's important!"

Belson said something to Howard I couldn't understand. Then I heard his hurried, measured footsteps pass over me and away. Then quiet. I drew the revolver from its waterproof plastic bag.

Howard Sundale was sitting motionless, staring seaward, and the sound of the rushing surf was enough to cover my noise as I climbed up onto the pier, checked to make sure Belson was gone, then walked softly in my canvas deck shoes toward the wheelchair.

"Mr. Sundale?"

He was startled as I moved around to stand in front of him. "Who are you?"

Howard Sundale was not what I'd expected. He was a lean faced, broad shouldered, virile looking man in his forties, keen blue eyes beneath wind-ruffled sandy hair. I understood now why Lani hadn't wanted me to risk pushing him into the sea. He appeared momentarily surprised, then wary when I brought the gun around from behind me and aimed it at him. His eyes darted for a moment in the direction of the distant house lights.

"For Lani, I suppose," he said. Fear made his voice too high.

I nodded. "You should try to understand."

He smiled a knowing, hopeless little frightened smile as I aimed for his heart and pulled the trigger twice.

Quickly I slipped off his diamond ring and wristwatch, amazed at the coolness of his still hands. Then I reached around for his wallet, couldn't find it, discovered it was in his side pocket. I put it all in the plastic bag with the revolver, sealed the bag shut, then slipped off the pier into the water. As I lowered myself I found I was laughing at the way Howard was sitting motionless and

dead in the moonlight, still looking out to sea as if there was something there that had caught his attention. Then the cold water sobered me.

I followed the case in the papers. Murder and robbery, the police were saying. An expensive wristwatch, his wallet and a diamond ring valued at over five thousand dollars the victim was known always to wear were missing. At first Belson, the elderly chauffeur, was suspected. He claimed, of all things, that he'd been having an affair with his employer's wife and was with her at the time of the shooting. That must have brought a laugh from the law, especially with the way Lani looked and the act she was putting on. Finally the old guy was cleared and released anyway.

The month Lani and I let pass after the funeral was the longest thirty days of my life. On the night we'd agreed to meet, I reached the beach house first, let myself in and waited before the struggling, growing fire that I'd built.

She was fifteen minutes late, smiling when she came in. We kissed and it was good to hold her again. I squeezed the nape of her neck, pulled her head back and kissed her hard.

"Wait...Wait!" she gasped. "Let's have a drink first."

There was a fleck of blood on her trembling lower lip.

I watched her walk into the kitchen to mix our drinks.

When she returned the smile returned with her. "I told you it would work, Dennis."

"You told me," I said, accepting my drink.

She saw the pearl handled revolver then, where I'd laid it on the coffee table. Quickly she walked to it, picked it up and examined it. There was surprise in her eyes, in the downturned, pouting mouth. "What happened?"

"I forgot to throw it into the sea, took it home with me by mistake and didn't realize it until this afternoon."

She put the gun down. "You're kidding?"

"No, I was mixed up that night. Not thinking straight. Your husband was the first man I ever killed."

She stood for a moment, pondering what I'd said. After a while she took a sip of her drink, put it down and came to me.

"Did the police question you about the gun?" I asked her.

"Uh-hm. I told them it was lost."

"I'll get rid of it tonight on my way home."

"Tomorrow morning," Lani corrected me as her arms snaked around my shoulders.

"And we'll meet here again tomorrow night...and the night after that and after that..."

Despite her words her enthusiasm seemed to be slipping. That didn't matter to me.

Lani was the first one at the beach house the next evening. It was a windy, moon-bright night, only a few dark clouds racing above the yellow dappled sea at right angles to the surf, as she opened the door to my knock and let me in. Her first words were what I expected.

"Did you get rid of the gun?"

"No. I watched her eyes darken and narrow slightly.

"No?..."

"I'm keeping it," I said, "for protection."

"What do you mean, Dennis?" The anger crackled in her voice.

I only smiled. "I mean I have the revolver, and I've left a letter to be opened in the event of my death telling a lawyer where it's hidden."

Lani turned, walked from me with her head bowed then wheeled to face me. "Explain it! It doesn't scare me and I know it should."

"It should," I said, crossing the room and seating myself on the sofa with my legs outstretched. "I wiped the gun clean of prints when I brought it here, then lifted it by a pen-

cil in the barrel when I left here after you last night. Your fingerprints are on it now, nice and clear."

She cocked her head at me, gave me a confused, crooked half-smile. "So what—it's my gun. My prints would naturally be on it."

"But yours are the *only* prints on it," I said. "No one could have shot Howard without erasing or overlapping them. Meaning that you had to have handled the weapon *after* the murder—or during. If that gun ever happened to find its way to the police. . . ."

Her eyebrows raised.

"I could tell them I found it," she said, with a try for spunk, "and then it was stolen from me."

"They wouldn't believe you. And it isn't likely that anyone would take the gun without smudging or overlapping your prints. What the law would do is run a ballistics test on it, determine it was the murder weapon then arrest you. What's your alibi?"

"Belson—"

"You'd be contradicting your own story. And I doubt if Belson would come to your defense now. No one would believe either of you anyway. Then there's that past you mentioned."

I grinned, watching the fal-  
len, trapped expression on her pouting face. A bitter, resigned look widened her dark eyes. When I rose, still grinning, and moved toward her she backed away.

"You're crazy!" Fear broke her voice and she raised her hands palms out before her. "Crazy!"

"It's been said," I told her as calmly as I could.

I made love to her then, while the moon-struck ocean roared its approval.

Afterward she lay beside me, completely meek.

"We were going to be together anyway, darling, always," she whispered, lightly trailing her long fingernails over me. Her fingernails were lacquered pale pink, and I saw that two of them were broken. "It doesn't matter about the revolver. I don't blame you. Not for anything."

She'd do anything to recover the gun, to recover her freedom.

"I'm glad," I said, holding her tight against me, feeling the blood-rush pounding in her heart.

"It doesn't matter," she repeated softly; "doesn't matter."

That's when I knew the really deadly game was just beginning.

# Woman of Ideas

by  
JOANN S. SCHEB



*Of course Melissa was right. She always was. This time she was very right. He would make certain of that . . .*

"ALL RIGHT!" Melissa snapped. "All right! What are we going to do now?"

Harold sighed and ran a hand through his thinning hair. "I don't know," he said, "but I guess we'll just have to

sit here and wait until somebody comes along."

"On this God-forsaken road?" Melissa was incredulous. The road was, indeed, a God-forsaken, back-country Georgia road, and, thinking back,

Harold couldn't remember passing or being passed by another car in the forty minutes or so they had been on it.

"Maybe there's a house—" he began.

"Do you see a house? Do you see any lights? Do you see anything?"

Harold saw trees. There were lots and lots of trees, and there was enough moonlight to see that there wasn't much else except the stretch of lonely road that curved and dipped around and over the hills ahead and behind them.

"Try to start it again," Melissa said. "Don't just sit there doing nothing!"

Harold knew it was useless, but he turned the key in the ignition. The starter made a feeble, groaning sound, but nothing else happened.

"We're out of gas, Melissa," Harold said. "I know we're out of gas." There was no point in reminding her that he'd been warning her that the tank indicator was nearing the empty mark for the past hour and that she had rejected first one gas station and then another. The first had been the wrong brand, the second on the wrong side of the road, the third was dirty-looking. There was no point at all in reminding her. Melissa was always right.

"Harold, you are absolutely

the most helpless man I have ever known," Melissa said. "I don't know what ever made me think you could get me to Florida and back."

Harold said nothing. It hadn't been his idea. At home, at least, he could get away from her eight hours a day.

"How far is it to the next town?" he asked.

Melissa had the map in her lap. It had been her idea to get off the turn-pike and follow this lonely state road, then pick up the turn-pike later. She had figured it would save about twenty miles.

Now, she pushed the map under the dash lights and bent her flabby figure over it. "Let's see," she said, running a stubby finger along the blue line. "That last town must have been a good six or seven miles back. That means the next one is about twelve miles from here."

Harold looked at his watch. "It's ten minutes past ten now," he said. "Let's see. At a mile every fifteen minutes, it would take about three hours to walk into town—" Harold was an accountant by profession, and little mathematical problems like that were a part of his conversation. He could figure them out while he talked.

"Harold!" Melissa said. "Why don't you just go back to the



town we already passed? It's only half as far."

"But nothing was open, Melissa."

"Well," she said. "Somebody would just have to *get* open. After all, we're stranded."

"Oh," Harold hadn't thought of that, but he guessed it was a good idea. He didn't like it, though. He couldn't imagine himself pounding on someone's door and demanding that they get up out of bed and sell him some gasoline, but he supposed it could be done.

Maybe Melissa would do it. She never minded putting other people to trouble.

"Well," he said. "Should we get started?"

"We?" Melissa almost shouted, her whiney voice rising a full octave. "You expect me to walk five or six miles? In these shoes?"

"Well, I could get some other shoes out of the suitcase. . . ."

"Harold, you're out of your mind!"

"Maybe we could sleep in the car," he suggested hopefully.

"Harold, I am not sleeping in this car." She was a large woman. It was difficult for her to get comfortable in a bed, much less a car.

"All right, Melissa. I'm sorry. I'll go."

"And leave me here all by myself?"



"Melissa," he said patiently. "I can't very well stay if I'm going."

"But anybody could come along here and rape me and rob me and murder me."

"I'll lock you in," he said.

"Windows can be broken!"

"I don't know what else I can do."

"You never know! You never have any ideas of your own!"

"I'm sorry, Melissa. I didn't mean to run out of gas."

"Well, you did. So I guess the only thing you *can* do is go back to that town and wake somebody up and get them to bring us some gas."

"Do you think I should have some money?"

"Of course you should have some money!" Melissa picked up her pocketbook and found a

five dollar bill for him. "Now, hurry. It's getting cold."

"Yes, dear," Harold said.

"And Harold. Wear your gloves."

"Yes, dear," he said again.

"I swear, if I weren't around to tell you to breathe, you'd never think of it for yourself! And remember, Harold. Hurry. Anybody could come along here and break in and rape me and rob me and murder me!"

Yes, dear," he said one last time, and then he got out and locked the door and started walking back down the narrow road. "Rape me and rob me and murder me," she'd said. Ugh! he thought. Who'd want to?

But when he stumbled over the sign-post, he knew. It was an old post, rusty and dirty and nearly five feet long. It had apparently been knocked down some time ago.

Harold wasn't a big man, but he hefted the post in his gloved hands and walked slowly back towards the car. After all, he thought, Melissa was always right. *Anybody* could come along, break into the car and rape her and rob her and murder her. But not necessarily in that order.

She sat with her head thrown back on the back of the front seat, her eyes closed. She was apparently asleep.

Harold sucked in his breath. The post was very heavy, but he felt a new kind of strength surge through him as he lifted it and took aim.

She never knew what happened. The post smashed through the glass and caved in her forehead in one motion. Harold opened the door, and she fell out onto the ground. He hesitated, then decided that robbery and murder were enough, and, lifting the heavy post again and again, he let it drop on her skull three more times before he reached into the car and took her pocketbook from the seat.

After all, he thought as his gloved hands took the money out of her purse and slipped it into his pocket, anybody could have broken into the car and robbed her and murdered her.

He tossed the pocketbook into the bushes and started walking back toward the town again, and for the first time in twenty-two years, he was glad that Melissa had so many good ideas.

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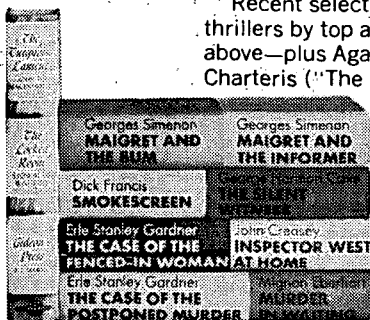
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